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CASTE AND CREED.

CASTE AND CREED:

A NOVEL.

91165

BY

MRS FRANK PENNY.

"Pity and need
Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood,
Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears,
Which trickle salt with all; neither comes man
To birth with tilka-mark stamped on the brow,
Nor sacred thread on neck. Who doth right deeds
Is twice-born, and who doth ill deeds vile."

EDWIN ARNOLD in "*The Light of Asia*."

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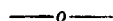
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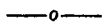
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CASTE AND CREED.



CHAPTER I.

L O V E.

“O, how this spring of love resembleth
Th’ uncertain glory of an April day;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away !”
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

MR PERCY BELL stood in the centre of the room where Mrs Anderson had shaken hands with him. He stared moodily before him at nothing in particular, passing his fingers over the long moustache which hid the firm mouth beneath it. He was endeavouring to control his temper, and for the present dared not trust himself to speak.

He was angry, very angry, with Rutnam, and he longed ardently to kick him down the stairs and out of the house. He was

surprised and annoyed at the wrath which surged within his breast, and hardly ventured to analyse his mind in its tumultuous state. It was for the father to be angry; he was the proper person to resent the intrusion. It was no concern of his, Percy Bell's, that this girl's relatives chose to force their way into her private room uninvited.

"It is strange that you, of all people, should be the only one to see my mother. I have spoken of her oftener to you than to any one else. I did not dream of bringing about such a meeting, but now that it has happened, I am so glad. Tell me, is she anything like what you expected?"

The sound of the girl's sweet voice quieted him; her gentleness, and affectionate anxiety to hear him speak well of her mother, aroused his better nature. He made a great effort to subdue his temper.

"She is quite different from what I expected; she has a pleasing dignity, and a kind and gentle face."

It was very difficult for him to praise the Brahmin lady, but Zelma gave him a look of gratitude for those few words.

"I am so glad to hear you say so!" she exclaimed, speaking impulsively. "I was so afraid of growing ashamed of my mother; of forgetting her smaller virtues and qualities, because I failed to find the great ones with which I had invested her in my childish,

romantic mind. You do not think that I need to be ashamed of her, then?"

There was a depth of earnest pleading in her voice which penetrated the cloud of anger still lurking on Percy's brow. The words had slipped out on the impulse of the moment, before she had given herself time to think what she was saying. There was not another soul in the world to whom she would have said so much. Percy comprehended exactly what was in her mind; and knew that she was once more indulging, unknown to herself, in the blessedness of opening out her heart to a trusted friend.

"You have certainly no need to be ashamed of your mother," he replied. "But it would be undesirable for many reasons, to introduce her to your friends."

He spoke very gravely.

"You did not mind meeting her?" she exclaimed, in sudden apprehension; there was something unusual in his tone.

"I! Certainly not. On the contrary, for your sake, I am glad. Knowing you as I do, I need hardly say how interested I am in all that concerns you."

The words were exceedingly kind, but the warmth was gone from his tones; and the love-light, that was just beginning to kindle in his eyes, had died away. Zelma saw that he was changed, but she could not

tell how. She looked at him a little anxiously, and said,—

“Why are you so serious? So offended, if I may so express it?”

A faint smile passed over Percy's face.

“You are learning to read my countenance very accurately, and guess at my secrets. I am offended and annoyed, but not at your mother. I take the liberty as an Englishman of being angry at the presence of that young Brahmin in your private room. He had no business to be there, and what is more, he knew it.”

“Why should you be angry? My mother brought him here. He is a relative; she is surely able to play propriety to her own people under her own roof. You are no relation, and yet you are here alone with me; there seems nothing improper in the situation.”

Percy felt irritated at her sudden defence of her mother, and he replied,—

“There is a great deal of difference; the two cases are not parallel. You and I belong to the same nation by education, and we conform to the unwritten laws of English society. The Brahmin does not. He is nominally guided by his own caste rules; and according to those he is committing a gross piece of impertinence by coming here, even under the cover of your mother's wing.”

“Surely she has a right to bring whom she

pleases," persisted Zelma, who was determined to see things in their best light.

"By the custom of her own country, she has no right whatever to introduce any man into her family. Her husband is the right person to make the introduction; and, without his presence, the intrusion of a man who does not live under the roof is an unwarrantable piece of impertinence," replied Percy.

He felt that it was his duty as a friend to place the matter before her in its true light; though, at the same time, he knew that he had no right to censure her or her people, however much in the wrong he might consider them.

"I do not think that Rutnam meant to be impertinent," said Zelma.

She had never met with anything but the warmest sympathy from Percy, and she did not understand his anger. It chilled her, and made her unhappy.

"The man knew perfectly well that he had committed a social error. I do not believe his tale of being driven here to seek a hiding-place. I do not believe that he came to see the ball; but I believe for some reason or other he came to examine your rooms. Perhaps he wants to boast to his own friends of having been in them. You would never have invited him, I know," he said, turning suddenly upon her. "No,

you need not answer such an unworthy remark. You must forgive me. I am so angry with that impudent, presumptuous scoundrel, that I hardly know what I am saying."

"I think, Mr Bell, that you are presuming on my father's rights. After all, if any one should be angry, it is he."

She turned away from him, and he could see that she was hurt.

"Forgive me," reiterated Percy, sorry to see the girl grieved. "You know I should not dream of censuring you; but I cannot drop the subject thus. At the risk of further offending you, I ask if your father knows that you meet this so-called cousin?"

"Yes, and he has left the matter entirely in my hands. I may deal with my mother's people as my judgment dictates."

"A dangerous permission for such an idealist as you are. But, Zelma,"—the Christian name slipped out unintentionally; the girl's quick ear caught it, and she flushed,—
—"promise me that you will keep this Rutnam at a distance. Do not give him the privileges of either friendship or relationship. He can do you no good, and you are as a child in the hands of such a man as I take him to be."

She was softened by his appeal, but not convinced.

"You need not be alarmed for my safety. I have my father to protect me," she said. Then, seeing a look of disappointment on Percy's face, she added,—“I promise willingly to see very little of Rutnam. It was a great surprise, and not a pleasant one, to find him here to-night. I will let him know that it was a breach of etiquette which must not occur again; I am sure that it will not be repeated.”

“I am glad indeed to hear you say so,” broke in Percy, with great fervour.

Zelma put up her hand, as though to bid him wait till she had finished.

“But understand this, Mr Bell, though you have lectured me so severely about the unadvisability of cultivating my cousin's acquaintance, I still intend to meet Rutnam again.”

“I suppose it is unavoidable,” he muttered.

“It might be avoidable, but I do not wish to avoid him. I am going over to Srirungam, to see the temple with him next week,” she said.

Although her tone was not actually defiant, there was a ring of determination about it which showed the uselessness of combating her fixed resolves.

“And then you need not see any more of him,” said Percy unwisely.

“I shall meet him again, most likely, in

my mother's room. I can always put an end to the interview whenever I choose by leaving. I am determined not to be ashamed of my mother's relations, nor to shrink from knowing them."

"Of course, if it is your pleasure—"

"It is not a pleasure, but a sacred duty, the duty of honouring my parents."

Percy was silent. He knew her warm, impulsive nature, as well as her high-minded rectitude. If she looked at it in the light of a duty, it was useless to attempt to move her. She was treading on dangerous ground, but nothing less than experience would teach her that she was making a mistake.

He said no more, but the cloud still rested on his brow. Zelma was conscious that the brightness of the evening was dimmed; she made an effort to reinstate their pleasant relations.

"I am afraid we have disagreed in our line of thought. It is for the first time, and I am sorry," she said.

The assertive tone was gone; there was something of the chidden child in her manner which touched him strangely. When a woman has maintained her point, and shown resistance to the guiding hand, her heart smites her for her naughtiness, and she is humble and sorrowful. Without the least coquetry, Zelma was unconsciously making her way straight into the young

man's heart by her suddenly-expressed sorrow. It suggested to his mind the thought that he had been hard upon her, when he ought rather to have commended her for adhering to her duty. He caught her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Do not let us quarrel. Your friendship is very dear to me; and some day you may need mine sorely. You will always turn to me if you want a friend?"

Without trusting himself to wait for her answer, he left her.

The strains of a waltz came in at the open windows, and died away as the civilian disappeared behind the punkah. A sense of loneliness and disappointment came over her as she stood there, motionless.

* The busy feet had ceased, and the hum of voices scarcely penetrated her retreat. The band would begin again presently, but just now the silence of the night seemed to pervade everything.

Percy left her in this sudden manner because he dared not trust himself with her any longer. He had allowed his wrath to rise, and had taken upon himself to expostulate. This was followed by a dangerous repentance, aroused by the girl's natural sweetness, though she still felt obliged to differ from him. The inclination to "kiss and make friends" was strong upon him; for very safety he fled.

Zelma was not altogether blind to the situation. As she stood there, the memory of his look and manner before he met her mother and cousin came back upon her, together with the strange way in which he had gazed at her now and then, bringing the answering light to her eye, and blood to her cheek. The change in his behaviour after the important meeting in her room was impressed upon her with a startling vividness; for the first time she recognised the truth that Percy was something more to her than ordinary acquaintance, and she to him.

She was not frightened by the thought, but a great wave of warm, subdued feeling flooded her soul. For a moment, the horizon of her already perfect happiness was extended, and she caught a glimpse of a new vista of life, a glimpse which thrilled her to the very centre. She had set her foot within that fairyland which lies between friendship and love, and become aware that an inner Eden lay beyond the Paradise she had already reached.

The first notes of another waltz fell on her ear, reminding her that she had been absent too long from the ballroom. She hastened downstairs, and was met by her father in the hall.

"Mrs Stainer has just driven off. She begged me to bid you good-night."

"Is Mr Bell with her?"

"Yes; he also asked me to say good-bye for him. He is going on by the early morning train, and therefore was obliged to leave; or he would not get any rest at all."

For a second Zelma was sorry that she would not see him again; but as the memory of what she had discovered came upon her, she was contented that it should be so. In matters of love the man is ever in haste, but the woman cries, "Let be, let me enjoy each moment in its entirety; give me breath, give me time, before you hurry me into the future."

Mrs Stainer's example was already being followed, and for the next hour Zelma was fully occupied in speeding the parting guests.

"Well, my child, have you enjoyed your evening?" asked Anderson of his daughter, as he bade her good-night.

"Oh, so much, dear father. It has all been so charming."

He gazed into her bright face, and mentally put down the sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks to the pleasure of the evening.

"God bless you, my own," he murmured, as he kissed her.

He watched her up the stairs with moistened eyes. He had noted the un-

disguised admiration she had evoked; he had marvelled at the ease with which she had played the hostess, and his heart was filled with love and pride. How little he had guessed what a blessing the Creator had in store for him in his old age.

Mrs Stainer found Percy a silent companion as they drove home. She was determined, however, to hear some opinion from him concerning the Andersons. She had great faith in his judgment of humanity, and was curious to know if her own coincided with his in this case.

"What did you think of Miss Anderson?" she asked.

"I thought her more beautiful and more charming than ever," he replied readily. "Her love for her father seems to act like a summer's sun upon her nature, and it has supplied the one thing which seemed wanting."

"It is strange that no love other than filial takes possession of her heart. There have been several young men at her feet, but none make any impression."

"There is no hurry on her side. She has all that woman can desire. What more can she want?"

He spoke indifferently, and Mrs Stainer searched his face in vain for signs of consciousness. Percy was master of himself, and she could not but conclude that he was

not to be numbered amongst the many at her feet.

"A girl's life is never complete without the lover. It must come sooner or later, and Zelma will one day find that her father is not all in all to her,"

"Do you think so?" said Percy. Again he spoke with indifference. He had no desire to discuss the subject with the good lady by his side, however kindly she might be disposed. "Do you ever see her mother?" he asked.

"Never, and Zelma says absolutely nothing about her now," replied Mrs Stainer.

"You don't know if she is at all surrounded by her mother's relatives?"

Mrs Stainer was surprised at the question. She answered,—

"I know absolutely nothing of Mrs Anderson's relations, but I should say that it was extremely improbable that Mr Anderson would allow his daughter to have anything to do with them. He cannot, of course, deny her access to her mother, but I really know nothing of what goes on in the house, for Zelma and her father are both silent on the subject."

"And not knowing anything, you would be quite unable to advise Miss Anderson?"

"About her conduct? Quite, as far as regards her family relations; but in all social matters, Mrs Beaumont and I have

always found her so ready to take a hint, and sweet and gentle over it."

Percy listened ; praise of Zelma always fell pleasantly on his ear, but he saw that it was useless to hope that Mrs Stainer could help the girl in any difficulties that occurred with the mother.

They arrived home ; he said his adieux before going to bed, as he would probably be off too early to see Mrs Stainer in the morning. He was about to turn away, when she stopped him to ask if he would not come to them for a few days on his way back.

"It is very good of you, but I am afraid I must say no ; my time is so short. I am delighted to have seen you all again, but I must not linger on the road. Good-night, Mrs Stainer. I hope you will rest well after your dissipations."

He was gone before she could remonstrate ; but the decision of his tone left small hope that remonstrance would have been of any avail.

"He has probed her heart, if he has not actually proposed," thought Mrs Stainer, "and he has found it whole. Like a wise man, he does not beat his head uselessly against a wall, but takes himself out of harm's way. I wonder what he was thinking of when he spoke of the girl's mother."

As the train carried Percy far away from Trichinopoly the next day, he had ample

time for reflection. He tried to fathom his own feelings regarding Zelma. Again and again the vision of her face came before his eyes, and he remembered the happy smile of pleasure with which she welcomed him. Was it merely admiration with him, or was it something stronger?

It had seemed easy enough in the past to talk of her marriage in the abstract. But when it came to seeing young men like Gibson hopelessly in love with her, he found that there was no such thing as a calm contemplation of her engagement. He discovered also that he was unfeignedly glad that the young men made no impression upon her.

He had thought of her dispassionately in the performance of her domestic duties; he had taken it for granted that she would not only find congenial companionship in the native woman, but would also sink to her level in mode of life and thought. Yet, when he met Mrs. Anderson and Rutnam in her sitting-room, his wrath had arisen, and he had expressed his displeasure in terms that overstepped the privileges of friendship.

What did it mean? Could it be possible that he was falling in love?

The mere thought made the blood surge to his temples, and set his heart beating as it had never beaten before.

When Percy first came out to India, he

deliberately put aside all thought of marriage, and devoted himself to the one guiding star that illumined his horizon. Ambition was his beacon; a desire to succeed in doing something for the good of the country, the land in which the best part of his life was to be spent. That ambition satisfied, he meant to look about him, and choose some gentle, lovable girl, with his head quite as much as his heart. He very rarely let his thoughts dwell on this part of his future, as he was no dreamer, but when he did so, he saw himself the complaisant, affectionate husband of a well-bred woman, who would idolise him, and bear him sweet, cherubby children. Life was to be smooth and even when the goal was reached.

It was, therefore, very disturbing to the usual even tenour of his mind to find his heart playing him false in this way. He had cut his visit short by twelve hours, lest he should be tempted to see Zelma again, and he resolutely told himself in the bluntest, plainest language, that he would be mad to link himself with a woman whose native relations would hang about his house, whether he liked it or not.

The heart may be talked down for a while, and love be browbeaten off the field, but it will only be for a time; and Percy had yet to learn how futile such attempts would prove.

It was as well for his peace of mind that

he did not see Zelma the next morning. That last half-hour spent in the boudoir opened his eyes to the fact that he regarded her with more than ordinary interest. She had felt the sting of his remarks, and had noted the warmth of his tone when his anger rose, and she respected the man who dared to reprove her. With true womanly instinct she thought more of the hand that corrected than of that which caressed. There was not another amongst all her acquaintances who would have ventured to warn her that her mother's people were not all that she imagined them, or who would have told her, in the face of all her excuses, that her mother had no right to bring the young Brahmin into her room.

When she heard from Mrs. Stainer the next day that Percy was gone, and that he had refused to stop on his return journey, she gave no sign that she was disappointed. And when good Mrs Stainer began to express her wonder at his conduct, she turned the conversation upon the ball, letting that lady go away with the impression that Percy found no place in her heart.

"The girl has no thought for any one but her father ; and, whilst she has him, she will never fall in love," said Mrs Stainer to her husband.

"And it is better so," he returned. "She is very young, and, so long as she lives in this neighbourhood, or even in this presi-

dency, nothing but vexation can arise from any love affair with an Englishman here."

"She could be taken quite away, and all undesirable ties severed," urged Mrs Stainer, who, womanlike, would have liked to overcome all obstacles to a girl's marriage.

"Impossible! the girl would never consent to leave her father nor her mother, so long as she thought that either of them needed her."

"Would her love never be great enough to make her sacrifice everything for the man who won her heart?" asked Mrs Stainer, who knew something of Zelma's nature.

"In my opinion, never. She idolises her father, and has a strong, old-fashioned sense of duty towards her parents. She would sacrifice everything to them," replied Mr Stainer.

"And if she finds a lover?"

"The lover will suffer."

Whilst Zelma and Percy were testing the bonds of friendship by coming to the verge of a quarrel, and at the same moment were beginning to discover that life might contain something more than mere comradeship for them, happy-hearted little Minnie was proving that love was not to run so smoothly in her case as it had promised. Not a cloud had hitherto arisen on her placid horizon to ruffle her life. She and Captain Bevan had drifted insensibly into

the rosy-coloured fairyland of love, and it only remained for him to speak.

He intended doing so that very evening, and there was no misgiving in his heart as to the result. He was quite sure of his little love; too sure, for the very certainty made him careless. Through sheer thoughtlessness, he allowed Minnie's sky to be overcast, and her loving heart to be assailed by doubts. These would never have troubled her, had she heard from his lips the confession which only wanted opportunity to be forthcoming.

An old flame of Captain Bevan's was at the ball. She had come on a short visit for the gaieties of the holidays. She was a fine young woman, single, but with all the assurance and self-reliance of an experienced matron. She had been in the country five years, and was well seasoned. She spent every hot weather on the hills, and was as exuberantly healthy as if she had been in England all her life. She had met Captain Bevan at Madras, before he had dreamed of the existence of such a person as Miss Beaumont. There had been a little idle flirtation between them, which meant nothing but passing amusement to such a girl as Miss Ewen. She carried on the same sort of thing with twenty other men of her acquaintance, and meant nothing.

She chaffed them, danced and rode with •

them, monopolised them for the moment to the exclusion of all others, making it a personal matter if they were not her devoted slaves. She talked to them in confidential tones, smiled at their replies, which were commonplace enough, but made it appear to the looker-on as though there was an especially good understanding between her and her companions.

It was all manner, if poor Minnie had only known it, put on, just as in the old days she herself had acted a part for the edification of her schoolfellows.

Miss Ewen, finding that Captain Bevan was one of the best-looking and smartest men there, revived the old flirtation, and tried to appropriate him to herself for the evening. She had no intention of making another girl miserable; nor had she any desire to awaken more than a passing interest. If he had talked seriously of love to her, she would very quickly have dropped him, and he knew it. Miss Ewen flew at higher game than a staff corps captain.

She gave him three dances, and made him promise to take her in to supper. He would rather have had his little Minnie by his side, but he was too chivalrous to snub a lady who seemed anxious to honour him with her attentions. He also felt flattered by this handsome woman's preference for his company, and, without having the least

notion that two sweet blue eyes were watching him sorrowfully, he allowed himself to be led, and, for the moment, to appear to forget her. If he had only already spoken and told his love, all would have been well. Minnie would have understood and trusted him; but there was still the uncertainty due to his silence, and poor Minnie was miserable.

After supper Miss Ewen walked Captain Bevan off to see a fernery and palm-house at the end of the long verandah, which was softly lighted by gay-coloured Chinese lanterns. There was not a word said that Minnie might not have heard; not a breath of love-making passed between the two. But the careless talk was productive of much misery for Minnie; she sat out forgotten during half the waltz which the faithless captain should have danced with her.

She had chosen the dance immediately after supper, feeling confident that he would be the one to take her into the supper-room, and that they would be together. She had been terribly disappointed when she saw him lead away Miss Ewen, without so much as a passing glance at herself. As for asking him to take her in, she would have felt ready to sink into her pretty white satin shoes before she would dare to commit such a barefaced piece of boldness.

There was no lack of cavaliers ready to

take her in, and it was not long before she was following Captain Bevan and Miss Ewen to the supper-table. But there was a sad little heart hidden under the smiling face that listened to the chatter. After supper she went back to the ballroom, where she might easily be found by her partner. She was just in time to see him go off down the verandah, looking only too pleased at the amusing conversation his companion was providing for him.

When half the dance was over, Minnie rose from her seat, determined to seek solitude in Zelma's room upstairs, not in the least aware that a strange scene was already being enacted there.

She got as far as the hall when she met Captain Bevan and Miss Ewen returning from the palm-house.

The young officer hurried forward full of apologies for having forgotten her, and really feeling very much concerned and troubled. Miss Ewen looked at the two, and in a moment guessed how matters stood. She was too successful and good-hearted a girl to feel any triumph in having acted the part of a marplot in any real love affair. She added her apologies to Captain Bevan's so heartily, that Minnie's tell-tale face brightened visibly ; and she smiled her forgiveness. Miss Ewen also seemed so ready to give up her partner, that Minnie

could no longer suspect her of trying to steal his heart. Her wrath was quelled, and, happy in the presence of her lover once more, she found it impossible to preserve the offended tone she had meant to assume, or maintain a cold, distant manner.

As Miss Ewen walked away, leaving the pair at the ballroom door, she said to herself,—

“Bless me. I believe I have been taking the wind out of that poor little soul’s sails. I had no idea either of them meant anything serious, as he is only a staff corps captain. Ah, well! I daresay they will have it out, and be better friends than ever after it. Perhaps I’ve brought matters to a crisis for them.”

She moved off in search of fresh game, married or single, it did not matter to her, so long as the men were not tiresome enough to fall in love with her, but were contented to pay her the homage and attention which, with her handsome face and amusing tongue, she expected.

“I am so sorry, Miss Beaumont, that I was late for our dance. Miss Ewen insisted that I should show her the palm-house, and I could not get away,” said Captain Bevan, now that they were alone.

“I don’t believe that you wanted to get away, Captain Bevan,” said Minnie, with some spirit.

There was an aggrieved ring in her tones which showed that, though ready enough to forgive, she was not inclined to pass over his offence with a word.

"Indeed I did. You will forgive me, wont you?" he said, with more softness than usual in his tones.

But Minnie was determined to thrust her little darts home.

"It will matter very little to you, I should think, whether I forgive or no. Come, let us take a turn before the music stops, then your duty to me will be finished, and you will be able to seek your old friend Miss Ewen again."

Captain Bevan was about to put his arm round her waist, and glide into the stream of dancers, but something in Minnie's tones made him pause. He glanced into her blue eyes, and the suspicion of a tear there—in spite of the smile that played upon her lips—suggested another course to him, one which he had all along intended to take before the evening came to a close. His heart smote him as he suddenly became aware that she was really hurt and unhappy through his carelessness.

"No, we won't dance just now; I should like to show you the palm-house too."

Poor Minnie! she felt rather like a naughty child, being marched off to receive a private scolding, all to herself, for her

wicked little temper. She was inclined to rebel, but Captain Bevan was not to be resisted; and it was with a fluttering heart that she turned her back on the ballroom, to be led down the carpeted verandah towards the dimly-lighted palm-house.

What should she say if he were to reproach her with being selfish? What right had she to monopolise his attention if another girl claimed it? Already she had had three dances with him, quite as many as was consistent with propriety. She longed to run away, for she felt certain that the tears would come, in spite of all her endeavours to keep them back, if he scolded her.

But Captain Bevan had no intention of scolding his little love. He was longing to take her in his arms, and allay the foolish jealousy which was making her heart ache so unnecessarily.

Under shelter of a group of fan palms he stopped, and, taking her two hands in his, he looked at her for a few seconds in silence, the love-light shining in his eyes and telling all his tale.

Minnie's blushing cheeks and lowered eyes answered his unspoken questions.

Then he drew her to him, and made a warm and living necklace for himself of her fair, white arms.

Down went Minnie's head till her face was hidden on his breast.

"My little Minnie! You did not think for a moment that I had really forgotten you? You are always in my thoughts, and you know that I love you better than all the women in the world. Look up, my darling, and tell me that you forgive me."

Very shyly she raised her blushing face, only to be taken advantage of, and to receive the first kiss of love which the young man eagerly took from her lips.

"You were jealous, little woman; now, confess, wasn't it so?"

No man is averse to learn that his lady-love is jealous.

"Perhaps I was, just a wee bit, when you seemed so absorbed in that girl," murmured Minnie.

"That girl,' indeed!" laughed Captain Bevan. "Never mind, it is all right now; I am very thankful to 'that girl' for rousing your temper, and letting me see that I might speak. I was so afraid lest I should frighten my pretty bird by singing my song of love too soon. Do you know that it is a sad fact that many a girl refuses her first offer because it is her first? She is too startled to know that she is in love."

All this time Minnie was gradually recovering herself from the renewed blushes which the kisses had produced—for Captain Bevan had helped himself liberally. She looked up shyly and said impulsively,—

"I am quite sure that I should never have refused you, because—"

She stopped suddenly, as she discovered what an admission she was making.

"Yes? Because? Go on," he said, laughing.

But Minnie dropped her head again in confusion, and would not finish her sentence.

"Because you loved me too well?" he whispered, and he just caught a faintly murmured, "yes."

Whilst Zelma stood alone in her room, wondering what new feeling it was that was rising in her heart, whilst Percy found safety in flight, whilst Mrs Anderson and Rutnam went back to their part of the house, satisfied that if Zelma refused to give what they coveted, they possessed the means of taking, Captain Bevan and Minnie found their earthly Paradise amongst the palms.

The waltz ended and another began. Expectant partners were forgotten by the happy pair in the bliss of the moment.

Mrs Beaumont was among the last to leave. As Captain Bevan said good-night, he whispered in Colonel Beaumont's ear,—

"May I come and see you some time tomorrow, sir?"

The Colonel gave him a comprehensive glance, and let his eye fall on Minnie, who,

with heightened colour, was sitting in a corner of the carriage.

“Certainly; come in to breakfast at ten; I shall be up, though I daresay the ladies will be a little late.”

The heartiness of the Colonel's tone told him that he had nothing to fear, and the next day Minnie's happiness was complete.

Captain Bevan, however, was not so contented at first as he expected to be. Colonel Beaumont insisted that the young couple should not be married immediately. Minnie was so young, only nineteen, and they were disinclined to part with her so soon. Captain Bevan had some little private means of his own, but it would be all the better if he took time to get the nest ready for his bird.

After a little grumbling on his part, it was arranged that the wedding should take place at the end of the next hot season, when Minnie would have had five or six months of hill air. Captain Bevan became more reconciled to the period of probation when he found that he could see her daily

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPLE.

"Oh, Amitaya ! measure not with words
Th' Immeasurable ; nor sink the string of thought
Into the Fathomless. Who asks doth err,
Who answers, errs. Say nought !"

EDWIN ARNOLD.

JUST a week after the ball, Zelma and her mother went over to Srirungam to pay the promised visit to Rutnam, and afterwards to see the temple. The girl at first proposed to drive her mother with the black horses and open phaeton, but Mrs Anderson exclaimed in horror at the notion of riding in an open carriage. She urged also that Zelma would not know the way, and begged her to accompany her in her own brougham : to this proposition the girl acquiesced in her usual graceful, affectionate manner.

Anderson was busy in the office, and at four o'clock he went, according to his custom, to his daughter's room for tea. He found her in her hat, ready to go out.

"Where are you off so early, Zelma?" he asked.

"I am going to Srirungam with mother. It is a long-standing promise. I shall be at the club at half-past seven, and will drive you home," she replied.

"Why do you want to see Srirungam with your mother? Why not ride over some morning with me?" Anderson asked, looking at her a little curiously.

"I thought it would please her if I took an interest in the great temple, to which thousands of pilgrims of her own caste come every year. I sometimes fear lest we neglect mother between us, and leave her too much alone. Our lives seem somehow so complete without her."

Anderson sighed. It was a subject he never dared discuss with his daughter.

"I will look for you, then, in the ladies' room at the club, and you will drive me home," he said, as he got up to go back to the office.

Zelma took up her gloves and moved out of the boudoir with him. She linked her arm in his, and they wended their way down the broad staircase together.

Standing by the fountain in the hall, they found Mrs Anderson. She was robed in a magnificent silk cloth; her arms and neck were laden with heavy gold ornaments. She had drawn her saree over her head,

according to custom. Although she was no longer young, and was too stout to be beautiful, she made a quaint and pleasing picture. The rich colours of her cloth contrasted with the vivid greens of the ferns and arums. The sparkling water gave life to the scene, for the Brahmin lady was almost as still and motionless as the foliage beside her.

But Anderson saw no beauty in the picture. As his eye fell on his native wife, his heart smote him that he had, in the carelessness of youth, made that woman the mother of his daughter. Ought not some gentle, high-bred matron of his own nationality be now waiting to chaperon the rare and beautiful girl by his side amongst his own countrymen? What good could come of this woman leading a girl like Zelma amongst her own kind? There was not a single thought or custom of theirs which could do the girl any good, or elevate her character.

However, what was done could not be undone. There was but one remedy; that was the girl's own marriage, and consequent removal from her mother. But that would bring also the separation between himself and the one human being who now brightened life for him, and made it worth living. Life would be a blank without her; he knew that he could never forget her, and go back to the old existence of money-making with any

pleasure. Her marriage would be the death-blow to his happiness.

"This is something new, for you to be taking your daughter out," he said kindly.

Mrs Anderson smiled, and looked from one to the other, but said nothing.

"Come along, mother, let us be off. Good-bye, father; tell Anthony to send my carriage to the club at half-past seven."

Zelma and her mother went through the hall to the back of the house, where a long verandah ran the length of it. Here the peons waited, and the punkah-pullers sat. People who called to see the master on business entered the office from this side. Here the servants waited for orders, or were interviewed by Anderson and his daughter when anything particular had to be said.

Mrs Anderson's carriage waited outside. Whenever she went out driving, she descended from her room by a private staircase, and started from this side. Such a custom for the mistress of the house was quite consistent with the habits of Brahmin ladies in their own homes.

The carriage was a well-appointed brougham, furnished with venetians as well as the usual glass windows. The venetian shutters kept out the rain and the sun, but let in the air. They hid the occupants of the carriage from the eyes of passers-by without obstructing the view altogether. It

was a vehicle specially adapted to the use of a native lady, and by this time it was well known on the Srirungam roads.

Zelma and her mother got in, and were driven swiftly away towards the great town, through which they were to pass. Its busy streets were thronged as usual with men, women, and children; many of them were perilously near being run over now and then, in spite of the warning shouts from the horse-keepers. Beyond the town they reached the broad Cauvery, and crossed it by the fine bridge which bravely withstood the turbid annual floods..

Srirungam is an island, formed by the branching and subsequent conjunction of the river. It is extremely fertile, and is held to be sacred ground by the Brahmins. They profess to allow none but the twice-born to reside on it.

A temple dedicated to Vishnu stands in the centre. It is surrounded by seven enclosing walls, each forming a square. The walls were built successively, as the temple increased in fame and wealth; the shrine always formed the centre. These walls are pierced by gateways, which are surmounted by towers or goparums. They are wedge-shaped, and highly ornamented with figures from the Hindu mythology. As each successive wall was of greater extent, the goparums increased in size and magnificence. Those

in the last or outer wall exceed all the others in height and grandeur. The gateway which forms the principal entrance is unfinished. It is the largest of all, and composed of enormous blocks of stone. How the native mason and builder could have placed them in position, and lifted them to the great height where they now rest without the modern appliances and machinery, passes the understanding of the intelligent visitor.

The outer enclosure, which is entered through this unfinished gateway, contains the houses, where live the Brahmins who cultivate the rich soil of the island. The second enclosure contains dwellings and rest-houses, which are crowded in the time of feasts. The occupants of these houses find employment in the temple itself, and are fed and clothed from its revenues. It is said that as many as fifteen hundred souls receive their meals daily. In the third enclosure are shrines of the inferior deities, and large raised platforms covered with roofs supported on pillars. These platforms are called muntapums, and are used as resting-places for the idol, on the occasion of its yearly procession. When not required for the idol, the muntapums are generally crowded with pilgrims, and with itinerant tradesmen.

Within the fourth enclosure none but caste Hindus are allowed. Certain castes

have had the privilege of passing through the gateway of the fourth, fifth, and sixth. But the seventh, which contains the shrine, the moolasthanum, is strictly forbidden to all but the true Brahmin. Even he must be of a certain age, and have performed certain ceremonies, before he is fitted to come before the adytum, or that part of the temple in which the idol rests. The idol itself is made of brick and mortar, and has no ornament of any kind. Beneath it is supposed to be the original image of gold into which Vishnu changed himself under the name of Sri Ranga. On great festival occasions an idol is brought in procession round the outer enclosures, where it can be seen by worshippers of all castes. It is a smaller likeness of the big one, and is made of the five metals, necessary, according to the Hindû faith, for the construction of idols, viz. :—gold, silver, brass, copper, and lead.

The limbs and features of this processional image are encased in plates of gold ; and it is gorgeously adorned with silk cloths and jewels. A large umbrella embroidered in pearls and gold is carried over its head ; it is set upon a heavy wooden car, like that known as the Juggernath car. The elephants are tethered to the cumbersome carriage, or the people themselves, in their enthusiasm, seize the massive ropes, and

draw it into the thronged street that runs through the outer enclosure.

The circle is slowly made, with frequent stoppages to allow the pilgrims who have made vows time to prostrate themselves. As they do so, they raise the cry of "Govinda! Govinda!" to the senseless image. The nautch girls dance before it with indecent song and gesture. They are the god's wives, and whoever takes one of them to his arms performs an act of worship; whilst the liberal payment which he places in her hands is part of the spoil of the temple.

The sacred elephants, marked with the mark of Vishnu upon their foreheads and ears, move slowly among the people, and occasionally add to the din of the tom-toms, horns and chants, by their trumpeting.

The dust, the sun, the voluble irreverent chatter of the worshippers, the bright coloured cloths of the women, the white garments of the men, the velvet trappings and jangling brass bells of the elephants, the staring golden image, combine to impress the mind with the reality of this picture of seething living idolatry.

There is indeed such a reality about the worship, such evidence of faith, awe, and fanaticism on the part of the worshippers, that it is difficult for the looker-on to believe that it is all useless mummery; some

of it, he it ever so little, must surely reach the Supreme Being, whom the Christian worships through the Saviour. Yet the whole is so polluted by profanity, sensuality, and immorality, that a glance below the surface causes the thoughtful gazer to turn away with loathing.

The idols belonging to the lesser shrines are also carried at different festivals in procession. But one heathen feast is very like another in its main features; and all are a source of income and wealth to the Brahmins.

Although Zelma was to visit the temple, she would not be permitted by Rutnam to see the nautch girls, nor, indeed, any of the temple accessories likely to shock her. Coarse pictures of the loves of the sensual Krishna would be hidden from her. She would not be allowed to pass the hideous carved figures that ornamented certain goparums, with all the boldness of their stony nakedness; nor to examine the ghee-anointed idols in the minor shrines which were open to all alike.

Rutnam knew what he was about. Nothing was to jar upon her pure mind, nor destroy the ideal which he meant to create. He was anxious, for reasons of his own, to awaken her warm-hearted, generous sympathies on behalf of her mother's religion. He hoped, in the shade of her innocent

ignorance, to uplift his own and depreciate her religion, until they stood on a level. He thought it would not be difficult to persuade her that they both directed their worship to the same God, the difference being not so much in creed, as in ritual and mode of worship.

This is a common piece of self-deception adopted by the educated Hindus, who, although conservative to the backbone and anxious to uphold the religion of their ancestors, are conscious that it is full of gross superstitions, immoral practices, and indecent absurdities which no educated man can accept.

The carriage drove first to Rutnam's house, which was situated on the banks of the river. The road passed along the top of an embankment, so as to be above the water when the river overflowed its banks and flooded the land. Overhead the flamboyant acacia arched its wide-stretching branches, laden with scarlet blossoms set in a vivid emerald green foliage. Tall clumps of feathery bamboo waved their grass-green tops in the topes that bordered the road; and the tulip tree strewn the ground with its great primrose-coloured cups.

By the roadside sat women with their little trays of sweetmeats, betel-nut, jack-fruit, plantains, and rice cakes. Their children played in the dust on the sloping

banks, and the tiny black babies lay by their mother's side sleeping, or solemnly blinking at the dazzling patches of burning blue sky that shone through the acacias. Long lines of carts laden with rice, sugar, fruit, and grain passed slowly along to the busy market on the other side of the Rock. Groups of pilgrims from distant places camped out where the road widened a little; or, risking the poisonous snake, penetrated a little way into the wood, and found a resting-place under the tulip or banyan trees.

Nothing escaped Zelma's appreciative eye. The scenery pleased her, and seemed to bring her more in sympathy with her mother than she had felt before. It would not be difficult to be amiable and pleasant to Rutnam, but she was determined to find an opportunity of telling him that he must not come to her room again without an invitation.

Indeed, she would make amends to her mother for any possible neglect by devoting this afternoon to her and her people. She would endeavour to forget temporarily all her European belongings, and be her mother's own daughter.

In this somewhat dangerous frame of mind, she arrived at Rutnam's house. A glorious mass of the pink, gem-like blossoms of the antigone creeper festooned the gateway, and the gate itself was open, as though guests were expected.

They got out, and walked up the path towards the house. On each side a neat garden of pot-plants flourished. Beyond it was the vegetable garden, where the pumpkin and the cucumber, the tomato and the egg-plant grew.

Rutnam and his mother stood in the verandah; as soon as the young man caught sight of them, he hurried forward to meet them, salaaming first in the fashion of his own country, then shaking hands with Zelma.

He was dressed in European fashion, with the exception of his turban; this added dignity to his appearance, and gave him height. He wore patent leather boots of the prescribed pattern which Government has ordained may be assumed with the turban without committing a breach of etiquette.

Zelma had never seen him before attired thus, and she thought the dress becoming. It brought him nearer the European, and partly bridged over the wide gulf that appeared to lie between herself and her Hindu relatives.

Rutnam led the way into a centre room, which was furnished something in the fashion of a bachelor's drawing-room; but it was very evident that it was only a reception-room, and never used for the purpose of sitting in. There was a strange collection

of works of art and rubbish about. Beautiful oil paintings, done by native artists, hung side by side with trumpery coloured prints of fat Frenchwomen. Exquisitely engraved brass, silver, and copper trays, lotas, and bowls, stood in close company with the commonest china shepherdesses and dogs.

An old-fashioned round table, covered with a handsome English cloth, occupied the exact centre of the room. On it were laid albums, a few books, some enamelled copperware, carved tortoiseshell paper-knives, a cheap blue-glass inkstand, an ivory box, and three or four ornamental tooth-combs. A very gaudy glove-box, with a common looking-glass lid, stood in the centre of the table, and the rest of the things were placed with mathematical precision round it.

The room gave ample traces of wealth, but there was an utter absence of taste in the display. Not a flower was to be seen in any of the numerous vases, and the dust lay thick in one or two corners.

Mrs Anderson did not sit down. After waiting a few minutes, she moved quietly away behind a screen, and Rutnam's mother followed closely upon her heels. There was a murmur of women's voices, and a smell of coffee, which told that she had found some more relatives, or congenial spirits, who were expecting her.

Zelma made no attempt to follow her mother; she had no desire to do so; but, turning to the Brahmin, she began to talk, motioning to him to sit down.

"What a pretty road it is from the bridge here, with the beautiful flamboyants arching their scarlet wreaths overhead. I could have seen it better if I had been driving myself, but mother did not like to come in an open carriage."

"The trees were planted years ago by an Englishman. Your father's countrymen plant trees, so do your mother's people. But the Englishman thinks mostly of the flower, whilst the Hindu considers the fruit. Miss Anderson, before I say any more, I have to tender you my most humble apologies for the unpardonable liberty I took of going into your private sitting-room. I should have been braver, and faced you on the stairs."

Rutnam spoke with earnest regret, and Zelma was more than satisfied that it was only the result of an accident.

"I think I ought to scold mother for taking you there. She was your guide. However, we will say no more about it."

"I assure you that it will not occur again. I shall not cease to blame myself for having so offended. It is very good of you to overlook my impertinence, and honour me with your company to-day," he said.

"It is in fulfilment of my promise,"

she returned, "and I expect you to keep yours of showing me the temple."

"I am only too delighted; but first you must have some coffee."

He clapped his hands, and a servant brought in a silver tray, on which stood two exquisite china cups containing coffee. Rutnam walked up to the man, and turning to Zelma asked if she took sugar and milk. On her replying in the affirmative, he helped her to both, and handed her the cup with the ease and grace of a drawing-room knight of the West. He then did the same for himself, and took the other cup.

Zelma looked on in surprise, which did not escape the quick eye of the Brahmin.

"Are you astonished that I dare to drink coffee with you?" he asked, with a smile.

"I certainly thought that, being a Brahmin, you would decline to join me, or any other not born in your caste, in any refreshment," she replied.

"But you are half a Brahmin, since your mother is one." He chose to put the matter in this specious way, wishing to make the girl identify herself with her mother. "However, you observed that I did not allow you to touch the basin or the jug; I helped you myself so that even your shadow should not cross the tray," he said, smiling.

The spirit of youthful fun prompted her to say,—

"What would you do if I ran after the tray, and laid my hands upon it?"

He answered her in the same spirit.

"I should have it washed."

Zelma burst into a peal of laughter.

"Come," she said, as she put down her empty cup, "we must not linger; I want you to show me your garden, and let me have a peep at this beautiful river before I go."

The young Brahmin rose at once, and led the way through the garden. As they left the front of the house, the ground became more moist, and the weeds grew side by side with the vegetables and flowers.

Away to the right and left of them, the garden stretched in a mass of luxuriant green, till it blended with jungle, and one could not say where the wild wood began and cultivation ceased.

They passed through a belt of plantains, from whose centre spikes of fruit hung in various stages of growth. The plantains came to an abrupt end, and Zelma found herself on a terrace, thirty feet high, above the river bank.

On each side of the terrace the banks were fringed with the grey-green elephant grass, ten feet high; out of this the slender stems of the palms pushed their way up in the sun's eye, lifting their feathery heads at least sixty feet above the grass.

The broad river, only half full at this

season, flowed down over its gleaming bed of sand in noble curves, passing immediately below the terrace. The gentle wash of the water against the stone steps, which ran down from the terrace, mingled with the pleasant rustle of the palm fronds above, and suggested coolness and freedom from the red dust of the busy road.

On the opposite shore, fully half a mile away, there clustered the long low chutrams or rest-houses, attached to the smaller temples which were hidden amongst the cocoanut and mango topes along the banks of the river. Flights of broad stone steps led down to the water.

Just now the steps were thronged with groups of people who were either about to bathe, or who had just done so. The moving figures, with their gay clothes, gave life to the scene; and Zelma, with her quick appreciation of the beauties of nature, was pleased with what she saw.

The Brahmin noted that she was impressed; he said, in low, earnest tones that harmonised with the lapping of the water, the rustling of the palms, and the gentle song of the sedge-warbler in the grass,—

“Is it not a noble, purifying self-denial which causes these people to leave their homes, perhaps hundreds of miles away, and to undertake a toilsome journey, lasting

several weeks, that they may wash in these waters, and be clean?"

His words vibrated through Zelma as she listened. Her mother's nature was roused within her, and she felt her sympathies awakening towards the people for whom Rutnam pleaded. At the same time her Scotch shrewdness arose, and she said,—

"Or is it a gross superstition?"

"Did Naaman find the washing in Jordan a gross superstition? Was it a gross superstition when your noble Man-God, Christ, was baptised in the same river?"

"That, of course, was no superstition," she replied hastily.

"Yet the waters of Jordan were no different from the waters of any other river. The merit of the deed lay in the faith with which they went to wash. These poor creatures"—Rutnam waved his hand towards the crowd—"come with blind, implicit faith to perform a simple act of adoration and worship, which is to reflect upon themselves and bring them spiritual benefits. Is it right to say that the deed is one of gross superstition?"

"It is certainly not for us to judge; but the pity is that they know no better," replied Zelma, with an uncomfortable feeling that she had spoken hastily, and that Rutnam was making her eat her words.

"All things are possible with the Supreme

Being. Perhaps these simple acts reach the great unknown Creator as a more acceptable gift of self than some of the prayers addressed to Him by the smartly-dressed congregations in your English churches. More than once I have stood at the great west door of your garrison church, and watched the people at their prayers. It seemed to me that they did very little for their God. They drove to the building in comfortable carriages; they were provided with comfortable seats, there were punkahs to keep them cool, and the service consisted of singing, praying, and reading, which was performed for them. They could join in it or not, as they pleased. You see that little group over there? We can just distinguish the old grandfather on the stone steps, the younger and more active members of his family have gone to the water."

"Yes, and I see a baby by his side."

In the clear, afternoon light of the tropical sun, every object was vividly distinct.

"That old man has left the home of his ancestors without a murmur, although he knew that he would probably die before he returned. He has hobbled and tottered wearily along the dusty roads, mile after mile. Sometimes his youngest son, the father of that babe, has passed his strong, young arm round him, and half carried him

over the road. When he could go no farther, the whole family waited for him till he was rested, spending the night under the spreading banyan tree, and cooking the evening meal by the wayside. Now that he is here, he has not strength to crawl down those steps, nor to walk across that heated stretch of sand. He must wait, like the babe, till he is lifted down and borne by willing arms to the sacred water."

He paused, and watched Zelma's face. Her luminous eyes were shining with pity. If that old man were her grandfather, how willingly would she help to carry his feeble body down.

"Poor old man!" she murmured.

He continued,—

"Do you think, Miss Anderson, that Englishmen would take their aged and their poor on long pilgrimages, and tend them so patiently with such care, to insure their happiness in the future?"

"No, they would not. But Englishmen would think it a doubtful benefit to drag their aged and their poor such weary distances; they make other and better provision for their bodies and souls. The charitable institutions of Great Britain are her standing glory," said Zelma.

"Perhaps," acquiesced Rutnam; "but does it ever strike you that the absence of all need of such charitable institutions—I

do not include hospitals—is more glorious still? Do you suppose for a moment that the family over yonder would dream of placing the old, worn-out, useless grandfather in an almshouse, to end his days a dependent on other people's charity, or try to save themselves the trouble and expense of his keep? No. Throughout India we do our duty towards our own by our family system, and sustain our paupers in our own homes without the need of public or private charity. Many a weak brother would end his days as a beggar in the streets if the instinctive benevolence of the stronger relative did not give him shelter. Ay, and more than shelter; he gives him the boon for which all India is now crying, education. The same instinctive benevolence which prompts us to feed, clothe, and educate our poorer relatives, causes us to give them the benefit of religion, and carry them with us on these long religious pilgrimages. But I am afraid I have wearied you, Miss Anderson, with my earnestness," said Rutnam.

"Not at all," she answered. "I assure you that I am intensely interested in all you tell me. You seem able to show me the country and the people under a new light."

The Brahmin's eyes sparkled with triumph; but she did not see them.

"I will call the carriages," he said, moving away at once.

"You will drive with us?" she asked.

"Thank you, no. It is very kind of you to offer me a seat in your carriage, but according to our notions it would hardly be the right thing to do."

Mrs Anderson was still in the back room. Rutnam went in to call her. He came back almost immediately, smiling.

"Your mother does so love a gossip with my people," he said.

"Your people?"

"Do you think that I have no relatives, Miss Anderson? I practise what I preach, and support a large number of relatives—sisters, aunts, a great-aunt, two great-uncles, and their families. Those that can work I find work for, those that cannot work rest and eat. Now, here comes Mrs Anderson. Your coachman knows the way; I will follow close behind."

They drove off, passing rapidly along. The carriage turned a corner, and Zelma noticed that the road was lined with native houses. The horses slackened their pace as they went under the tall, massive, unfinished gateway.

They had entered the great temple. The carriage drew up, and Zelma got out. Rutnam was following close behind, and joined her almost immediately.

"Are you not coming out, mother?"

"I think I will stay here till you come back. How long will you be, Rutnam?"

"Half an hour, or a little more," he replied.

"Take care of my child," said Mrs Anderson.

"Of course I will," replied Rutnam. "You do not object to walking round with me?" he asked of Zelma.

Mrs Anderson's remark had raised a faint shade of annoyance on his handsome face.

"Not in the least," she replied. "Which way are we to go?"

"Through this gateway," was the answer.

Right and left of them were stalls and shops. In nearly all were exposed little brass images for sale, and other things that appertained to the practices of the Hindu religion.

Turning to the right, Rutnam led Zelma through a series of courts, past little temples and shrines of minor deities. He explained as he went what they all signified. She listened and asked many questions.

"And who is Vishnu, to whom you say this temple is dedicated?"

"He is the great preserver of all, the god who rules the sun, and maintains the vitality of the world by pervading it and everything in it with his divine presence."

They were now standing in a vast hall, the roof of which was supported by pillars of stone.

"Here the worshippers of Vishnu assemble to fall down in adoration before his image and symbol, as the Roman Christians bow down to the crucifix, the symbol of your God."

"Of our Saviour," corrected Zelma.

He took no notice of the correction, but moved on towards a staircase at the end of the hall.

"It is an impressive sight," he said, "to see the thousands of simple-hearted worshippers, who assemble once a year in this hall, and raise their cry in one voice of entreaty for protection and preservation to the God on high. It surely cannot be that He turns His face from their prayers. Even your Bible says distinctly that there is mercy for the heathen, and that they will receive judgment by a natural law of their own; '*they are a law unto themselves.*'"

Zelma could only acquiesce. She said,—

"But if they violate that law and live evil lives, they will be brought under the wrath of the living God."

"So will the Christians," quickly rejoined Rutnam; "and, being the more enlightened, the Christian will be the greater sinner. '*To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*'"

Zelma was astonished at this glib quotation of the Bible. She turned to him, and asked if he had made it a study.

"I attended Bible classes every day of

my school-life at the S. P. G. College," he replied.

"And yet you have not become a Christian?" she said.

"On the contrary, it has only bound me the more tightly to the religion of my ancestors. It has thrown a new light and a new interpretation upon it. We are a patriotic, conservative people, Miss Anderson. We are anxious to hold fast to our old religion, to purify and beautify it rather than to accept a new faith. I am certain that, fundamentally, we stand on as firm ground as the Christians. When I attend the religious festivals, do you suppose for a moment, that I place myself on a level with the ignorant coolie, 'whose untutored mind' sees God in the metal symbols we raise before his eyes? No, a thousand times no! My religion is as spiritual as yours."

"And why should not the coolie be taught better, and learn to believe in God, and not in the image?"

"His nature cannot rise to it. If he were worshipping with you in your own church, his superstitious mind would see the Deity in the cross upon the altar and the picture of the crucifixion in the window. His spirit could not soar beyond it. Believe me, Miss Anderson, you and I might stand together in your own church, or here at one of our own festivals,

send up as pure a prayer, and perform as acceptable an act of adoration to the God of our forefathers, the Creator, the Preserver, the Destroyer of the world, as though we were born in the same faith."

The darkeyes of the Brahmin shone with religious fervour, and, for the moment, Zelma felt drawn towards her mother's religion.

It was impossible for a girl like her to confute what he said. In her innocence and ignorance, she was a mere child in his hands. She could not know that when Rutnam and his followers called upon the Great Preserver of the Universe, they cried, like the heathen of old, to a low, sensual god, the creation of their own diseased minds, that they appealed to him through his sensual acts, which were in themselves sins against the natural laws of humanity, and the divine laws of God.

She had never seen the orgies of a heathen festival, when the worshippers thought that their god was to be best served by the indulgence of their sensual appetites, and that the highest bliss was to be obtained by submitting themselves and their families to the caresses of the representatives of the Deity.*

* The guru claims the possession of the divine or mantric essence in his body. At certain times when visiting his disciples he assumes the posture in which the god is usually represented, and is paid divine honours. At such times his every deed is considered holy; and in ministering to his appetites, *nothing is refused him.*

Hinduism in theory is so widely different from Hinduism in practice.

Zelma was only seeing it through the glasses which the subtle Brahmin held before her eyes, and so successful had he been, that he had elicited her warmest sympathy. He was elevating her mother's religion, and lessening the great gulf which had hitherto seemed to lie between them in regard to their faith.

They had climbed the stairs, and reached the roof of one of the halls. From it they had a wide view of the whole temple. Rutnam pointed out the gilt dome of the moolasthanam, standing in the centre of the innermost court.

"What are the buildings we see round it?" asked Zelma.

"Those are the various courts and shrines where different rituals are carried on. In some there are lamps constantly burning before the symbols of the deity." He was careful not to call them idols. "In some, the Brahmin children, whose parents are attached to the temple, receive instruction." He forebore to say that they were for the most part the offspring of the Nautch girls, the progeny of the sons of men and the "daughters of the gods." "Over there we have our large elephant stables. We keep four that do nothing but take part in the daily religious acts and the great

festivals. One of the elephants, said to be the largest in India, lives a life of incarceration for months at a time in that large building over yonder. He is fed from the top during his madness, and no man dare enter his prison." Turning a little, Rutnam pointed in another direction. "That is a large shrine dedicated to Krishna. He is the incarnation of Vishnu, and corresponds to your Christ, Who is the incarnation of Jehovah."

"I did not know that you had a Saviour also," said Zelma.

"We have not only a man-god, but also a Trinity—the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer. The Creator is, of course, analogous to the Almighty Father of your religion; the Preserver to your Saviour; and the Destroyer to the Holy Spirit, Who, as you are taught, will condemn men in themselves, and, by his removal from their hearts, bring about their destruction. Vishnu, in his incarnation as Krishna, is the second person in our Trinity,"

"The name is curiously like Christ," Zelma remarked.

"Not only is he like in name, but also in circumstance," replied Rutnam. "The story of his incarnation is this: Vishnu, the Preserver of the Universe, saw that man was forgetting him through the growing power of evil, which was gaining an ascendancy

over mankind. In order to restore the good, and destroy the evil, he took upon himself the form of a man, and caused himself to be born of a woman as Krishna. It was prophesied that he should reign on earth as a king. In consequence of this, a massacre of children took place. Krishna was miraculously preserved, and lived to fulfil the prophecy. He slew the serpent of evil, and gave a new kingdom to his followers."

"It seems very like the story of our own Redeemer."

As Rutnam put it, it was. But he told only just as much of it as suited his purpose. He did not say that, whilst the Christian Saviour was a pure, sinless God-Man, the Hindu Krishna was a voluptuary indulging in every human passion which could emanate from a gross material soul.

Had he chosen, he could have shown her, within a few yards of where they stood, obscene pictures and carvings of Krishna playing with some of the cowherd women—the gopis—from whom he took a thousand wives. But Rutnam's purpose was to prevent her from knowing that such things existed, and he had little difficulty in the case of so pure-minded, unsuspecting a girl as Zelma.

His plausible words sank deeply in her heart, the glad surprise increasing as he talked. It was so pleasant to think that

she and her mother stood together fundamentally, differing only in minor forms and ritual. Never for a moment did she suspect him of perverting the truth and throwing dust in her eyes.

Hardly daring to believe what would be so welcome to her heart, she said,—

“But why, if your religion contains such vital elements of truth, does it not come nearer to ours in the practice of morality and goodness? In spite of all you say, there is a very wide gulf, surely, between the Christian and Hindu religions.”

“The reason may be found in the people themselves. They have dragged their religion down to their own level, as the dog drags the good food given it by its master into the mud. But there is no reason why the food thus taken may not be as efficacious as that which is eaten off the cleanest porcelain, in preserving the dog's life and health. But, fundamentally, there is not much difference. Both religions teach that God Who, is Sentient, Almighty, Omnipresent, and Omniscient, is our Father, and that his creatures, all of us, are brethren. In other words, the Fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of his creatures, are taught equally by the Shastrum* and the Bible.”

* The Shastrum is composed of Sruti (or Vedas), Sutras, Smriti, Itihasa, Puranas, and their commentaries by founders of sects. These form the books of the Hindu religious and social laws.

Zelma gazed at him in astonishment, and said,—

“Christian brotherhood is a reality. Each member of the brotherhood is taught that it is his sacred duty to love and help his brother; but surely in Hinduism there is no similar bond between you and people not of your caste. You despise your coreligionists whose caste is lower than your own. Would you eat with them, or allow them to eat with you? Would you touch them, or allow them to touch you? Even if their shadows crossed your food, would you not consider that food contaminated and unfit to eat?”

He was slightly taken aback by this sudden question on her part, but he replied, without hesitation,—

“Is it not the same with Christians? Has not every nation its own social laws, though they do not call them by the name of caste? Our caste practices are our social laws.”

“But in our religion we do not despise those who are socially below us, nor regard them as unclean. They may be poorer, less educated, and less refined, but we do not forget that they are equally with ourselves children of God, and our brethren in Christ. In short, there is of necessity a marked difference between a high-bred and

a low-bred person ; but religiously, and in the sight of God, there is none."

Rutnam felt that he was on unsafe ground, and, instead of replying, he led his companion down into another portion of the temple. As they were passing a shrine, she paused. A row of lamps burnt in front of it,—they were but primitive cotton wicks floating in oil,—and a Brahmin with shaven head was burning incense and camphor before the idol.

"Oh, let me see !" Zelma cried.

But Rutnam drew her on.

"Do not distress these poor earnest souls by gazing curiously at them. I can describe the ceremonies they are performing if you wish."

Zelma passed on at once without a word or look.

"Every day the symbols of our deities are washed with holy water. Flowers are hung upon them, and incense burnt before them. Food is presented in different forms, and, during the ceremony, hymns are chanted by the attendants and worshippers, who afterwards partake of the food. You use bread and wine in your Church."

There was a crafty insinuation in this last remark, which was unperceived by Zelma, as the Brahmin again placed his own religion on a level with hers ; he continued,—

"We use grain, you use bread. Grain of different kinds is the staff of our life; bread is the staff of yours."

Whilst he thus described the temple ritual, he purposely left her in ignorance of the nature of the so-called "hymns." Could she have heard and understood them, as they were sung by the temple girls before the various idols, whilst they danced a dance full of gesture in keeping with the sentiments of the "hymn," she would have been disillusioned.

He continued to talk till they had almost reached the gateway where they had left Mrs Anderson. Before Zelma went to the carriage, however, she insisted on being shown the door through which she and her father's people were not allowed to pass. Rutnam was unwilling to do so at first, but she would take no denial.

The magic barrier was like any other strongly-made door. Its strength was increased by being thickly studded with bolts and nails. It was closed with a heavy iron lock, such as might have fastened the door of a mediæval castle.

"And so you will never let me pass that door?" said she, smiling. "Or if I did get in, you would never let me out again?"

The words were lightly and carelessly spoken, but the Brahmin shot a sudden

glance at her, as though an inspiration had crossed his brain like a flash of lightning.

"I am not going to force an entrance," laughed Zelma, interpreting the look as one of apprehension. "With such a lock as that, I should have small chance of desecrating even the outer courts of yon moolasthanum."

As she spoke, the key turned in the lock on the other side, and the mysterious door was opened. To the astonishment of Zelma, and annoyance of Rutnam, Mrs Anderson faced them. Upon her forehead was a faint mark of sandalwood powder and sacred ashes, which did not escape Rutnam's quick eye. He spoke rapidly in Tamil to her, and in so low a tone that Zelma could not hear.

But, whatever, he said, Mrs Anderson only smiled at him in return.

"What is it, mother?"

"Your cousin thinks that I ought to have remained in the carriage, but I went to pray for my daughter at Krishna's shrine. Can any one be angry with a mother for so doing?"

"You were right, dear mother," cried Zelma. "Since I have been with Rutnam, I have learnt many things, and I can look across the narrow river that divides us, and see that my mother only acts in accordance with the natural law by which she will be judged."

Mrs Anderson did not understand the words, but she recognised the tone of love, and was satisfied.

Rutnam's fears were also allayed. The daughter was not ashamed of her heathen mother. It would all be well.

He led them to the carriage, and a few minutes later they were rolling swiftly along the darkened roads, where the fireflies took the place of the butterflies, and the busy traffic of the day had ceased. Mrs Anderson dropped Zelma outside the club, and went home by herself.

"How did you like Srirungam, my child?" asked Anderson, as they drove home to dinner.

"Oh, so much! I was pleased with all I saw, and all I heard. Do you know, father, I don't think that the heathen are so bad as people suppose," she said.

"God is their judge, my pet. It does not remain with us to condemn or commend. We must look to our own lights and see that they are burning."

With this the subject was dropped, for Zelma guessed instinctively that it was not one which pleased her father.

CHAPTER · III.

PASSION.

“Tender the passion of those dark eyes seemed
Brimming with tears ; yearning those outspread arms
Opened towards him ; musical that moan
Wherewith the beauteous shadow named his name,
Sighing, ‘My Prince ! I die for lack of thee !’”

EDWIN ARNOLD.

THE hot weather came on apace, and with March the ladies fled to the hills—that is to say, all those who could get away. Zelma, accompanied by Mrs Beaumont and Minnie, went up to Ootacamund. Anderson stayed with them a few days, and then returned to his work. Mrs Anderson was reconciled to her daughter's absence, knowing that she was still in the country, and would return shortly.

When the time came for leaving Trichinopoly, Zelma exclaimed against being thus driven from her home.

“You think that I cannot bear the heat ? I can bear it and enjoy it as well as my mother !” she cried.

But Anderson was very firm, and she was obliged to go.

When she was settled in her pretty house on the hills, she was very happy, and enjoyed it with the zest of youth and good health. Introduced by Mrs Beaumont, she was well-received everywhere. With such beauty and wealth, it was impossible that she should escape observation. At first people were inclined to cultivate her acquaintance through curiosity; but afterwards they gathered round her, charmed with her sweet face and manners.

At the end of September the three ladies returned to the plains. Minnie was soon to be married, and Zelma was longing to clasp her dear old father's neck once more. He had paid two or three flying visits to Ootacamund, but they did not satisfy her; she was craving for the happy *tête-à-tête* home life with him.

Anderson met her at the station, glad to have his darling by his side once more. He had missed her greatly, and had longed for her home-coming as ardently as she had done. Mrs Anderson also had a warm welcome for her daughter. But with her there had been no craving for a lost companion, as in the father's case. She had merely lost an object of love, and the knowledge that that object was within reach made her absence tolerable. It was

not such a rending and tearing of the heart-strings as when the little child was taken from her arms. Moreover, Mrs Anderson had long ago found consolation in religion, and could be happy in her own way without her daughter.

"Now, father, tell me all the news," said Zelma, as she sat in the brougham and they bowled homewards over the smooth, dusty roads.

"News; Zelma? Haven't I told you all the news in my daily letters? What more am I to tell you?"

"I must hear it all again. So Miss Seton has turned up, has she?"

"Yes; she is staying with Mrs Stainer, and that good lady is at her wit's end to know what to do with her."

"What are her latest vagaries? Is she trying to induce the natives to clothe themselves?" asked Zelma, laughing.

"She seems possessed with a demon of curiosity. She goes spying and prying about the town, running into every temple and mosque she can find," replied Anderson.

"She attempted to force her way into the large mosque the other evening, just at sunset, of all times, when the Mahomedans were assembling for prayer. There was such a hubbub. Mrs Stainer thought that her guest would have been torn in pieces. Instead of getting away quietly and quickly

when she had aroused a dangerous indignation by her intrusion, she wanted to stop and harangue the people, under the impression that she was doing missionary work."

Zelma laughed heartily.

"Yes, go on, father."

"She has also irritated the Hindus. One day she found her way down to a little temple near the river, and, after poking about, sat down to sketch it. There was a convenient flat stone placed immediately in front of the entrance, which suited her exactly as a seat. She put on her spectacles, and, with paper and pencil on her knee, was about to begin, when out came the man in charge, the local sannyasi, or devotee. His hair was long and unkempt, his body was covered with more dirt than clothes, his nails were claw-like, and his whole appearance insane enough to frighten a braver woman than Miss Seton. He gesticulated and talked in an unknown tongue; Miss Seton replied in English; growing louder and louder in her endeavours to make herself understood. At last the man began to prance round her, making little attempts to seize her by the arm. This terrified her, and she shrieked aloud. Most fortunately Mr Bell was passing at the time on horseback, and he heard her. He went at once to her rescue, and' found that she was sitting on

the sacrificial stone of some demon, to whom the temple was dedicated.

"It was really very lucky that Mr Bell was passing at the time, or Miss Seton might have been very roughly handled."

"It was indeed. Now she is not allowed to go out except under Mrs Stainer's charge."

"The Fullers, I suppose, have gone home?" Zelma remarked.

"Yes; they went off to Bombay. Mr Bell has taken up the work."

She was silent; she had not seen Percy since he left her room the evening of the ball just nine months ago. She wondered how he would greet her, and whether the encounter with Rutnam and her mother had loosened the bonds of friendship between them.

"There is only one other change since you left," said Anderson presently. "The chaplain and his wife are gone, and a young clergyman fresh out from home has been appointed. He has been at work for three months, and seems to get on all right; felt the heat in July and August, but is getting acclimatised and more used to it now."

"How is mother?" Zelma asked.

"She is quite well. She looked very happy this morning when I told her that she would see her daughter this evening."

They chatted on till they reached the house. As the carriage drew up under the

porch, Zelma jumped out, and ran up to her room. How home-like it all looked! She took almost a childish pleasure in going round and touching everything. Her treasures were as fresh as though she had left them only a few hours, instead of a few months.

"You shall never tempt me from home again," she said afterwards to her father. "The next hot season I shall refuse absolutely to be driven from home. What is the use of having a dear, dear, old father, if I have to run away and leave him?"

She found her mother unchanged. The old aunt was there, and this time, knowing who she was, the girl received her greeting with the sweet graciousness of a tender nature that feared to wound the feelings of others.

She had learnt to regard her mother's relatives in a new light since her visit with Rutnam to the temple. It was not the only talk they had had on religion. Two or three times she found him in her mother's room, and the conversation was renewed. Rutnam was well aware of the results of that visit to Srirungam, and he set his ready wit to work to make the most of the advantage he had gained.

Zelma seized upon his specious arguments with a fatal avidity and an eager faith that asked for no corroboration or proof. Her

impulsive nature and her aptitude for idealising everything around her, made it easy for her to accept Rutnam's subtle upraising of his own religion to the level of Christianity without question.

She began to regard him as a benefactor and a guide. He had thrown a light upon her mother's character which gilded the one dark spot that she had hitherto scarcely dared to look upon. Why should she doubt what was so pleasant to learn? But, lest she should doubt, and go to the chaplain or Mr Stainer, Rutnam placed certain books in her hands which seemed to support his fallacies.

Thanks to modern Oxford scholars, the Hindus of the present day have been brought face to face with their past; and have been made acquainted with the finest and best of their philosophical books. These the Oxford scholars translated into the English language. When they had put the Vedas into English, and the learned men of England had exclaimed at the purity of the morals they taught, the educated Hindus were able also to point out their lofty moral character, and translate them from the English into their vernaculars.

Rutnam placed portions of the Vedas in Zelma's hands, where she could read for herself the pure ethics and high moral teaching, which so closely resembled the

teaching of the Old Testament. As she read she idealised, till Hinduism grew to be a noble religion, as fine in many ways as Christianity, but cruder and less spiritual, on account of the people for whom it was intended. When she left Trichinopoly for the hills, her mind was full of the subject.

Rutnam smiled, as he thought of his success. When the time came, it would not be difficult to secure support and substantial aid from the rich heiress.

The day after Zelma arrived at home, Percy called. He was shown into the large drawing-room downstairs, where he had to await her coming. She entered the room with a heightened colour, half-anticipating a coolness on his part. He greeted her cordially, and no mention was made of their last meeting. The conversation was about ordinary topics. Percy gave a graphic and amusing account of Miss Seton and her globe-trotting vagaries. Just before he left, he asked her if she still rode every morning with her father. She answered in the affirmative.

"May I come out with you sometimes?" he asked. "I am getting up a 'bobbery' pack of hounds to try for jackals now and then, and we may have some good runs."

"We shall be delighted," replied Zelma readily. "Miss Beaumont will also be glad to join us till the momentous event comes off."

"Ah, yes! When is it to be?" asked Percy.

"Next month, I believe. I am so glad that we are not going to lose her by her marriage. They are to settle down near Colonel Beaumont, in that quaint little Octogan house near the parade ground."

After a little more desultory talk, Percy went away. Not a word was said of her mother or of Rutnam. The conversation was commonplace, and seemed at times to drag, as though they were strangers to each other. It was with a distinct feeling of disappointment that Percy drove off. He was conscious that she had treated him as an ordinary acquaintance, and kept him at a distance. She was so fearful lest he should be different in his manner that she had assumed the defensive involuntarily, and widened the breach between them.

He was disappointed and piqued, for he had been looking forward eagerly to the renewal of his friendship with her. To be placed on the level of a mere acquaintance annoyed him beyond measure. It was one thing for him to take up a prudential position and say to himself, "I shall be unwise to fall in love with this girl," and quite another for her to assume that position towards him. Prudence vanished, and vanity came to the fore, saying, "I will not be set aside in this fashion. There is

that which has already passed between us, which has made us more to each other than mere ordinary acquaintances. The past shall not be ignored." Percy remembered, too, that he had read something in her eyes on that memorable evening in January, which set his heart beating, and he was determined to call it forth again. He would fearlessly sweep his hands across the chords till he had once more produced the rare sweet tones that set his blood on fire. It was a mad game to play, fraught with overwhelming consequences to any but the cold and heartless. Far from being cold himself, he possessed just that drop of blood in his veins to which the passionate Oriental part of Zelma's nature appealed with a dangerous success.

With this purpose in his mind, he made opportunities to see her and talk with her. He joined her in her early rides with her father; he met her at tennis, and at the club, and he allowed himself to drift insensibly into a love which filled his whole being. He no longer looked at her critically, nor calmly wondered if she would display any feeble traits of character. He came to the conclusion that it was possible to unite the good qualities of the East and the West in one person, and for that person to possess a rare excellence, a nobility of purpose, and a beauty of mind, which might

be the glory of any man or woman. That he had found it in Zelma he was sure. She was one in a thousand, and he of all her friends knew and appreciated her best.

Anderson was not slow in perceiving that the young civilian and his daughter were being drawn towards each other. The shrewd Scotchman quickly grasped the situation, and he was glad. But his gladness was mingled with sorrow, for he could not think lightly of parting with the bright being who had so suddenly illumined his whole life. He knew that she could not live with him for ever, and that the lover must one day appear. As he watched the earnest handsome face bending over his daughter, and noticed the girl's answering flush of love-lit beauty, he sighed, but he was content. If he must part with her at all, here was the very man he would have chosen, a man of power, of determination, and yet whose heart could throb with a passion which would satisfy the tropical flower it would clasp to itself.

Minnie's wedding took place, and Zelma was one of her bridesmaids. Colonel and Mrs Beaumont assembled their friends about them, happy in the thought that they were not going to lose their niece altogether.

Percy was there as one of the groomsmen. As such it was but natural that he should be by Zelma's side. Never had the girl

seemed brighter or more fascinating, and he forgot all else in her presence.

The bride and bridegroom left by an afternoon train, and by eight o'clock Colonel and Mrs Beaumont were once more alone.

Percy went home to his solitary dinner full of thought. He scarcely knew what he ate or drank; and as soon as it was over he left the table and wandered out into the night. A bright moon shone overhead, making the gardenias gleam with a fairy whiteness amongst their glossy foliage. All nature seemed to call upon him to look into his heart. As yet he had not dared to do so; he had wilfully shut his eyes to the depth of his own feelings, he had beaten back love, and told himself that it was but friendship. Now, to-night, his heart refused to be unheard. It cried out in the calm beauty of the night, and told him that it had found the one object of its existence. Perfect or imperfect, she reigned supreme.

Like many strong natures he was long in giving way; but when once he surrendered, the surrender was complete. He defied his fate no longer; but bending his head upon his hands he murmured in low passionate tones,—

“Great heaven! How I love her! She is my second life, my soul! She must; she shall be mine!”

He walked down the garden path to the

palms, and stood for a while beneath their rustling fronds. He could not rest. A fever burnt within him ; he longed madly to go straight to her house, take her in his arms, and pour out the hot sun of his love upon her. Passion with him, when once unloosed, must speak, it could not be stifled.

Besides, he knew that if she loved him, she would be as eager to listen to the story as he was to tell it. In natures like theirs the coyness and cultivated reserve of well-brought-up English men and maidens found no place. Her heart had long ago burst the bonds of discipline and repression which the schoolmistress had superimposed ; and to Percy—and Percy alone—Zelma had dared to show what she felt. What the tongue had not said the eyes had told.

Whilst he thus walked in the light of the glorious Indian moon, or stood beneath the shade of tree and palm by the still tank, his love flooded his soul with rapture. Not a doubt of her reply crossed his mind now that he had made up his mind to give it rein. He knew that he had but to speak, and her love would mingle itself with his, making his happiness perfect and exquisite.

Should he seek her now ? Walk boldly in upon father and daughter as they sat in their verandah, and ask to be allowed to tell his tale ? No, he would wait till to-morrow, when he would be certain of his opportunity.

The sleepy servants wondered dreamily what ailed their master, and why he did not go to his room as usual. At last they began to close the many big doors and bar the windows noisily. Their master took the hint, and wended his way slowly to his room upstairs. But it was not to sleep. He could not rest within the walls, but sought the fresh night air on the broad flat roof upon which his room opened. The punkah, pulled by the patient old man below, waved over an empty couch, whilst the master was alone outside with his love in the stillness of the night.

The lightning flashed upon the horizon in a pale unceasing flicker, lighting up the great pyramids of cloud, that lay in heavy masses on the far distant hills in the north. As the electric current streamed in narrow threads over the rain-laden vapour, flashing from cloud to cloud, and awaking the answering gleam, so his love longed to entwine itself round its darling, and awake the magic current of passion into burning life.

But patience, patience; he must wait. He would see her again in a few hours, when the sun rose; and at least he would clasp her hand; she would surely know what was in his mind. Then the answering flush would dye her cheeks, and the sweet eyes would gleam with a light that sent a fire through his veins. And when the

evening came he would meet her again ; at the rising of the same moon that now shone above him he would take his darling in his arms and call her his own.

But what of the mother ? What of all his protestations against allying himself with the country ? Where was prudence ? Prudence and calm consideration were thrown to the winds ; the mother was forgotten ; it was the beautiful woman he thought of, and not her country, nor her people.

Zelma sitting by her father's side that evening, was unusually silent. She had discussed the little incidents of the day, the minor details of the wedding, the prospect, of the happy pair, and expressed her joy at seeing her friend's hopes so amply fulfilled.

After this she was silent. Anderson watched her through the blue smoke of his cheroot, and thought that he saw another wedding looming in the distance. The picture pleased him, though he gazed at it through a mist of sadness. It would be bitter to give up his daughter to another man ; to feel that the love which was now so lavishly bestowed on him, would be given to another. It would be a sacrifice, yet it was a sacrifice he would willingly make ; for he knew that he could not live for ever ; he knew that it would be best for his child to leave the unequally-yoked parents, and, if

possible, be removed from daily contact with the mother.

With another sigh Anderson got up.

"Good night, my child; God bless you, my dear."

He kissed her brown hair and fair brow.

"Good night, dear father."

Her white arms encircled his neck, and the soft round cheek rested lovingly against his for a few moments. Then Anderson left the verandah and went down to his own apartments.

Zelma did not go to her own room at once. She rested her arms upon the parapet, and gazed dreamily at the whitened landscape. The sound of the bugle came faintly from the barracks, followed quickly by the bugles from the different native infantry lines. At the moment when she was taking a last look at the calm sweet night, Percy was battling with his love, determining to go forward and grasp his happiness, regardless of all former resolves.

The next morning, before the sun rose, Anderson and his daughter were in the saddle. Percy joined them as they left the compound.

"Good morning; what a glorious fresh breeze there is this morning," said Anderson.

"Yes, the monsoon is close upon us," replied Percy. "The wind is shifting round

to the north-east. I saw heavy clouds and lightning in the north, last night."

"How lovely the moon was," remarked Zelma.

"Were you out last night?" asked Percy.

"We were in the upper verandah on the roof."

"I was out on the roof too. I wonder if we were thinking of the same thing," he added in a low voice, gazing into her eyes.

She gave him a sudden glance and smiled.

"You shall tell me another time," he said, without waiting for a reply.

Away they galloped towards the race-course, horses and riders alike enjoying the fresh morning air.

"We shall miss Minnie in our morning rides," said Zelma, when they presently drew rein.

"But not for long," answered Percy. "We shall have them with us again. Marriage does not make much difference after all. Our tastes and amusements must continue to be much the same. They will come back to the old neighbourhood, and fall into the same old ways."

"I don't agree with you," she answered; "Minnie will now have to consult her husband's comfort in all her arrangements. If for instance he wants breakfast at half-

past six or seven, it would wholly upset any plans of hers to accompany us."

"He surely would not let anything of the kind stand in the way of her pleasure," replied Percy.

"He might be perfectly amiable about it; but if I were the wife, I should find it impossible to be happy elsewhere whilst my husband was wanting me."

Percy looked as though he would like to be the husband, to claim the time and attention of such a bride as his companion would make.

Again they galloped on. The country was open, and they rode abreast. Percy had no opportunity to say what was nearest his heart. However, he knew that he would have no difficulty in the evening. He left them as they passed his house, saying,—

"I shall see you at the judge's 'At Home' this evening?"

"Certainly," replied Zelma. "I am engaged for a tennis set, and so I shall be there early."

"After tennis I have something to say to you," he said.

"Another funny story about Miss Seton?"

"Bother Miss Seton!" he exclaimed, as rode he away, a happy smile upon his face.

"What a good fellow he is," observed Anderson, as they slowly rode towards their home.

"Yes, he is by far the nicest of the men here," replied Zelma heartily.

"I am glad you like him," said Anderson slowly. "He is the only man I know who is worthy of my daughter."

She turned a startled glance upon her father.

"Oh, father, you must not talk like that. I am never going to leave you."

But as she spoke the colour mantled to her cheeks, and she bent her eyes on the reins she held.

"You must marry one day, Zelma, and Percy Bell would be the man I should choose for you if you left the matter in my hands. But I know well that young people choose for themselves, so that it is useless for me to say anything."

"Father!" exclaimed the girl; "I can never leave you for any man. Besides—" she hesitated; "there is always a difficulty. I am differently situated from other girls; I—" she could not go on.

"You mean your mother," he said, very quietly.

"Yes, yes," she answered eagerly.

He made no reply.

"I could never marry a man who would be ashamed of my parents," she continued. "I know, and have known for some time, that Mr Bell does not think well of such unions as yours with mother."

The girl spoke with difficulty, for fear of hurting her father's feelings.

"My darling, no man will ever be proud of your birth. Of that I am well aware. But his love may be great enough for him to take you as you are, and we, your parents, must give you up. I cannot wish it to be otherwise, though it will be hard to part with you."

The pained tone of resignation with which these words were said, drew tears to Zelma's eyes. She held out her hand impulsively to him, exclaiming,—

"Father, dear father, no husband shall tear me from you. Nothing shall come between our love."

But though Anderson took the hand, and held it in almost a lover-like grasp, he knew that the real lover must come to step in between himself and his daughter, and be successful in the end.

He helped her off her horse, and they went into the house. They were met by a servant bearing a large tray loaded with tea-roses, and a basket of strawberries.

"Oh, what lovely flowers!" she cried, as her eyes fell upon them. "Mr Bell said that he had ordered some from Bangalore, and that we should probably find them when we got home."

All thoughts of the future vanished as she carried off her treasures to put them

in water at once, before they should fade.

That evening Zelma started early for the judge's house. It was scarcely a mile away. The house stood in a large, park-like compound, and the tennis-courts were shaded from the western sun by some noble old trees, that had seen many a judge come and go.

Just before the games ended, Zelma caught sight of her father and Percy in a group of people near the court in which she was playing. At the last stroke Anderson moved away, but Percy remained, waiting till she should be disengaged. As she walked off the court, he approached her, and placed the soft, white, woollen shawl she had brought round her shoulders. They went with the rest towards the tables set out under the trees. A small group of thirsty tennis-players had gathered there to drink sauterne cup and eat ices.

The sun had sunk below the horizon, and the sky was glowing with orange and green, flecked here and there with crimson shreds of vapour. A great, crimson-capped purple cloud rose like a pillar in the north, and already the pale lightning played over its rosy head.

People looked up at it hopefully. It was the pioneer of the monsoon and of the welcome rains, the failure of which meant disease,

famine, and death. Gradually the rosy lights faded, and the orange sky turned to pearly grey. The lightning on the horizon grew bolder, and shot across from one mass of vapour to another. The moon rose above the trees, and threw its silver beams over leaf and blade, and over the white house and smooth garden paths.

Zelma pulled her shawl closely about her neck.

"I must not stand still too long after tennis, or I shall catch cold," she said.

Percy turned instantly, and led her from the merry group towards a path that tunnelled through the thick luxuriant growth of oleander, poinsettia, passe-rose, and jasmine that bordered the outer edge of the large garden.

The guests were sitting on chairs, chatting in groups, or were walking in couples on the deserted tennis-courts. He knew he would find solitude amongst the oleanders and jasmine.

They strolled along in silence; Zelma was happy in his company, whether he spoke or not.

They reached the old many-stemmed banyan tree, where the pet chrysanthemums and the tenderly-nurtured violets, which so rarely bloomed, found a sheltered home.

Percy stopped under the shade of the glistening leaves.

"Zelma," he began, his voice unsteady and low, "tell me, do you love me?" His eager tones thrilled her. "My darling, I know you do; but I want to hear it from your own sweet lips."

He took her hand and drew her nearer to him.

"Say it; say what is in your heart! Look up, my darling. Say, 'Percy, I love you.'"

He did not wait for a reply, his arm was round her waist, and his eyes searched hers with an irresistible fire. As she gazed up at him in one entranced look of love, he held her spell-bound. She could not speak.

Then his lips sought hers, and he kissed her passionately,

"My love! my darling! tell me!"

The barrier was broken down as his lips touched hers. He felt her arms creeping round him, he was conscious of a passionate clasp, and he heard the sweet words, spoken dreamily,—

"Love you! Oh, Percy, I love you more than words can tell!"

Again their lips met, and heart beat upon heart in a wild oblivious passion of desperate love.

"My darling! My love! My *wife*!" murmured Percy at last, shaken to his very core by the strong emotion.

At the word "wife," the girl started.

"Percy, let me go," she cried, wrenching herself from his grasp.

He let her go, for he was triumphant and satisfied, retaining only her hand.

"What is it?" he whispered, his fiery eyes devouring her as she stood there in the pale moonlight,

"I can never be your wife," she faltered brokenly. "I ought never to have allowed you to say or do what you did just now."

Percy's grasp on her hand tightened.

"Darling, you do not know what you are saying," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I do," she rejoined quickly and feverishly. "I know quite well what I am saying. I can never marry you, because I cannot leave my father. And you can never marry me because of my mother. I know quite well what the world will say."

For answer, Percy drew her to him in spite of her resistance, and tried to stop her mouth with his lips. It was very hard for her to resist. The heart cried, "Let be, let me love!" But the head said, "Think, think!"

Once again she freed herself, and, turning resolutely away from the triumphant eyes, that looked so boldly down upon her with happy, lover-like gaze, she said,—

"Do you remember the night of our ball? Do you remember the people you met so unexpectedly in my room? Could you tolerate those people under your wife's

roof, in your wife's boudoir, and allow that they had a right to be there?"

Percy suddenly relaxed his hold upon her hand. She recognised the movement, and continued,—

"You asked me that evening to avoid my relations. I could not do so. The man who marries me must not be ashamed of my family."

Her words sent a sudden paralysing chill through his heart, but it was only for a second.

"I will take you," he cried passionately, "and everything belonging to you. You I must have; I cannot live without you. Cost me what it may, you must be mine."

Again he would have drawn her to him, but she resisted.

"No, it shall not be. I will not drag you down and link you to a people you despise," she said.

"But you love me! I defy you to turn me out of your heart. You cannot do it!"

"I must! I must!" came despairingly from her lips.

She dared not trust herself with such a passionate, powerful lover. If he wooed her thus much longer, her will would be but as a broken reed before the blast; it would become ashes under the intense fire of his love. There was safety only in flight.

As he pressed another burning kiss upon

her lips, she wrenched herself from his arms, and fled towards the house.

The heart fought desperately with the head. She dared not listen any longer. Even as it was, her eyes belied the words she forced her tongue to speak.

Percy stood still watching her retreating figure. It was useless to follow her; and it would take some minutes for each to grow calm and collected.

Gradually the dismaying and unexpected refusal was forgotten in the blissful memory of her confession of love.

"How can she say that she will not be my wife? She loves me! She must come to me in spite of all that she says. Yes, and she shall come," said this determined lover.

He watched the big cloud now mounting high in the heavens. Its rosy lights had long since faded, and in place of them the moon had decked it with sheets of silver. The lightning still flickered and flashed over the dense vapour, sending its reflection earthwards. Every now and then a faint roll of thunder reached his ear.

Zelma fled, never stopping once to look behind her. She joined the party near the tennis-courts, and was relieved to find that a few of the guests were already preparing to depart. It was still early; and, as it was a glorious night, those who had no

engagement for dinner were inclined to linger on.

"Are you going home, Miss Anderson?" said an anxious voice in her ear; "because, if so, will you kindly give me a lift? My husband has just settled down to a game of whist, and I do so want to get home to the children."

It was an anxious mother who spoke.

"I shall be very glad to drive you home," said Zelma readily; "but first I must find my father."

She hailed with delight an excuse by which she could leave at once.

"My husband will bring him," replied the lady. "Oh! here is the judge. Mr Heyworth, will you kindly tell Mr Anderson that his daughter has driven me home; and my husband will give him my seat in our carriage."

Mr Heyworth promised to do so, and a few minutes later the black horses were stepping homewards.

Zelma had a faint recollection of nursery histories being told her during the drive, but it was a very wandering attention that she gave to the anxious little matron by her side. It was with real relief that she at last reached her own room, where she could fling herself into her comfortable arm-chair in the cool, darkened verandah, and give herself up to the luxury of undisturbed thought.

CHAPTER IV.

CHOLERA.

"A doubt, a dread that brooked not speech,
The shadow of some coming ill
Lay heavy at the heart of each,
And cast abroad its saddening chill."
OLD BALLAD.

PERCY made his way slowly back to the tennis-courts. He glanced round in search of Anderson, whom he found sitting with Mrs Beaumont and Miss Seton, listening to, rather than taking part in, the conversation.

Percy stopped beside his chair.

"Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Of course I can," said Anderson, jumping up. He always liked a chat with Percy, but he instinctively guessed that this was something out of the common. A sudden hope sprang up in his heart that he would hear the good news of the civilian's success with his daughter.

Percy went straight to the point.

"I have just been asking your daughter to be my wife."

"I am so glad. There is no man I would

so heartily welcome as my son-in-law as you," replied Anderson quickly.

Percy stopped him with a gesture.

"Wait; you are premature with your congratulations. Zelma has refused me."

Anderson looked surprised, but did not speak.

"She owned that she loved me," continued Percy, "but said that she could never be my wife."

"What reason did she give?"

"She said that she could never consent to leave you."

"Surely that was not the only reason. We should not have much difficulty in conquering that single objection," said Anderson.

"There was something more," said Percy. He hesitated, and his companion guessed what was coming. "She said she would never marry me because of her birth."

"Ah!"

It was the groan—the cry of grief a father might utter if he saw his child injured by his own hand.

The young man continued,—

"She is mad! She knows that I have been aware all along that her mother was a native. You will forgive me, Anderson, for speaking out in this manner; it is absolutely necessary that we should under-

stand each other. I have actually seen and spoken with her mother."

"You have!" exclaimed the Scotchman, astonished.

"Yes; in your own house, and in Zelma's presence. I own that at one time it seemed an insuperable bar, but now that I love Zelma, all such considerations give way. We love each other, and with your consent I am determined to win her."

Anderson was much moved.

"You have my hearty consent. I would gladly give my dear child into your safe keeping; and though it would be hard to part with her, I should rejoice to see the day which removed her from beneath my roof. I did wrong to bring her out here, even as I did wrong to marry her mother, though, God knows, I meant well, and did all that was honourable. Win her if you can, and take her away."

There was a sad tone of entreaty in Anderson's voice, which wrung the young man's heart.

"But what if she refuses?" he said. "She is proud, and can be determined. She has your blood in her to war against the warm loving heart. I know her well—she can be as firm as a rock, even though her firmness kills her. What shall we do?" And Percy turned to Anderson in despair.

The Scotchman stood for some moments in thought.

"Let matters rest for awhile. You are secure in her love, and having secured that, no man can rob you of it. Hers is not a nature that is likely to transfer its affections. Wait; be patient, and I think all will come right."

"It is so hard to be patient. Would you have me keep away from her? I do not think I could do it except by leaving the place."

"By no means," said Anderson. "On the contrary, see her all you can. Talk to her as though this interview had never taken place. Let her see that you love her, and can wait. Time brings all things to him who waits."

Anderson looked at his would-be son-in-law with a kind, encouraging smile.

"You are sure that she loves you?" he asked.

He had little doubt of his daughter's heart, but he wanted to know if the young man felt assured of it.

"As sure as I stand here," was the ready answer.

"Then all will be well. Ride with us as usual; meet us at tennis in the evening. Above all things, don't wear the willow."

"God bless you for a good friend,

Anderson," said Percy, as the two men joined the rapidly diminishing guests.

They were met by Mr Heyworth, who told them that Miss Anderson had gone home.

"Then I will take you with me," said Percy.

When Anderson met his daughter at dinner, not a word passed between them on what had happened. She was in good spirits; the flushed cheek and bright eye told how sweet was the knowledge that Percy loved her. But when, later on, she was alone again, she began to think of what she had done, and how she had spurned that very happiness from her feet.

Had she done right? Yes, she was sure of it. What Englishman could receive her mother with anything but shame? Could she bear to have her parents brought under contempt? her father blamed, her mother despised?

It was impossible to think of marriage. But, oh! how she loved him! Her heart had gone out to him wholly; and when his lips touched her, they awoke a fire within her which threatened to destroy her lifelong happiness. Poor Zelma! The bitter war had begun. How would it end?

The great pillar of cloud stretched overhead, and wrapped moon and sky in dense vapour. The lightning streamed across the blackness, and the thunder roared on all sides.

Zelma went to her window, and gazed fearlessly out upon the blue and red fire. The storm harmonised with her own troubled heart. She stepped out upon the flat roof, and walked up and down in the blinding light and alternate blackness, finding comfort in its rage and fury.

By-and-by the air moved, a light breeze stirred the tree tops, and a few great drops fell about her feet. Above the roar of the thunder, she could hear the rush of the coming rain, of the tropical torrent which had been let loose. She returned to her room, and a few seconds later the down-pour came. The noise of the falling water almost drowned the crashing sound of the thunder. The air grew chilly. She shut the doors and windows. The lightning came at longer intervals, and the thunder died away into long sullen roars, that shook the windows. But the rain continued. Zelma turned to her couch and threw herself upon it. Those few moments of love in the garden, when she rested oblivious of all else in his arms, had flashed across her sky lightning like. They were gone, and her day was changed to darkness.

The morning rides were continued, and Percy met Zelma as frequently as before. He did not seek now to be alone with her, nor to force his love upon her by any fresh

expression of it. It seemed to her as though he had quietly submitted to her decree, and accepted her refusal. At the same time she could not but perceive that his loyalty was unshaken. His manner always expressed tenderness and deference. When she was near, there was a watchfulness of her every movement. Her wishes were quietly anticipated, and every look was met with a glance of courteous love. No knight could have rendered more loyal homage.

Once chance threw them quite alone for a short time; the meeting was not premeditated, but purely accidental. The girl longed madly to throw her arms about him, and tell him that she loved him, that it would be impossible to live without him. But he gave no sign. He put a strong restraint upon himself, and, though his heart ached, and his lips hungered to rest again on that soft curved mouth, he resisted temptation, and stood like a loving brother by her side.

If it had not been for Percy's patient friendship, and loyal, enduring love at this time, she must have suffered in health. But his voice always brought the colour back to her cheek, and the light into her eyes.

Although he felt the situation to be very trying, he suffered less than Zelma, for he found consolation in Anderson.

“It will all come right, my boy ; you will win her in the end.”

It was repeated so often, that Percy grew to place implicit confidence in the prophecy of the clear-sighted Scotchman.

The thunderstorm which heralded the monsoon, and temporarily drenched the thirsty earth, was followed by another. This should have brought in its wake a continuous downpour, lasting, perhaps, with a few intervals, quite a fortnight. But instead of the welcome rain, the sun shone out again with burning, midsummer heat, and made the ground reek with miasma. The torrent had not been sufficient to wash away the impurities which heedless man and decaying nature strewed around them, poisoning the air and soil. The refuse thrown by the houses, the rotting vegetation, the foetid mud which lined the street gutters, were not carried away by the floods, but were only roused from their paralysed sleep of drought into hideous life. They exhaled dangerous gases, which crept like evil spirits into the thickly populated streets and crowded houses, and left the seeds of fatal disease.

When the monsoon rain fails totally, it means famine. When it fails partially, it means cholera. Death follows in either case to hundreds and thousands.

Percy, as collector, grew anxious. He had other things to think of besides his own

troubles. Night and morning he turned his eyes anxiously to the north-east. Heavy clouds hung on the horizon, and occasionally a few torn pieces of grey, watery vapour swept overhead, dropping just enough moisture to set the heated earth reeking again. The lightning played over the sky, and the thunder roared threateningly in the distance. Still no rain fell in any quantity.

November ended with whispers of the fell disease. It was coming up from the south : creeping by road and river, dead against the wind, which blew from the north, an unhealthy quarter.

“ They say that cholera has touched our district at last,” said a gentleman one evening to Percy at the club.

The collector was supposed to receive reports daily.

“ It is not quite correct, I am glad to say,” replied Percy, “ but I fear it will be by the end of the week. It is coming down one of the great canals to the river.”

“ How strange it is that the disease so often follows a stream,” said the other.

“ And stranger still that it will sometimes cling to one side of it, leaving the other side almost intact. I am going off to-night to the border village which is threatened, to see if, by my presence, I can inspire the people with some kind of courage. They become so unnerved with fear that they do

nothing to prevent the disease, nor make the slightest attempt at nursing or curing the sick."

Percy walked out of the club and looked towards the carriages which stood in a row along the broad drive. He could distinguish Zelma's, with its black horses, at a little distance. She was still sitting in it, having just returned from a drive with some companion. He went towards her and arrived in time to help Mrs Bevan out. Zelma was about to follow, when Percy said,—

"One moment, please. I want to tell you that I cannot ride with you to-morrow."

Minnie saw at a glance that Percy wanted to speak to Zelma, and not to herself. She therefore went quietly off to the ladies' room without waiting for her friend.

"Are you going into the district?" asked Zelma.

"Yes; I must go south, and I am starting to-night. I must dine early, and be off as quickly as possible. I wanted to tell you so that you should not wait for me to-morrow morning."

Suddenly a thought darted through Zelma's mind. She turned to him, and raising an anxious face, said,—

"Is it cholera?"

"Yes," he replied quietly. "I hope by my presence to inspire the people with some courage. I am taking two apothecaries

and a quantity of medicine and disinfectants. I shall leave no stone unturned to check it."

"You are going to attend these people yourself?" she exclaimed in horror.

"It is my duty. They are under my charge; and I am not a man, as you know, to turn my back on my duty."

"I know that! But oh, Percy, you may take the disease yourself."

The words left her lips before she had time to think. The anguish of her tones was unmistakable, and it set his heart beating. He took her hand under cover of the darkness, and whispered,—

"My darling! you must not be alarmed on my account. I must do all I can for the poor souls. When a man goes into the battlefield, he goes to find victory—no death."

Steps were approaching, and Zelma quickly withdrew her hand. It was the first time since the judge's party that he had ventured to show his feeling again; even now he had been surprised into it. It was the police officer, Colonel Mayhew, who approached on his way to the club.

Percy stopped him, and, after a few low words to Zelma, he turned away with him. For more than half an hour the two men talked earnestly on business, making various arrangements for the preservation of the

health of the town. So wedded were the inhabitants to their dirty ways, that sanitation had to be enforced by the police.

"I can scarcely hope that we shall be able to stave it off altogether," said Colonel Mayhew. "I am afraid it must come."

"At least we may be able to mitigate the evil," replied Percy, as they parted.

Just as he was leaving the club, he came across Anderson.

"I am off to-night into the district. I hear cholera is approaching. You must not expect me to join you in your morning rides again yet awhile."

Percy went with Anderson to the carriage that he might again clasp Zelma's hand. It was not that he was nervous about himself, though he ran a risk by going into the disease. In days gone by he had often been amongst the poor stricken creatures in other districts, and he felt no fear. But with her it was different. She was alarmed for his sake, and the alarm was sweet to see for it told its own tale of love.

"Good-bye, Zelma," he said. "I hope to be back in a week or ten days, but it all depends upon the health of the people."

She laid her trembling hand in his.

"God keep you safe!" she murmured.

As Percy walked away, he said to himself. "Anderson was right. I shall win her if I am patient."

Very anxiously Zelma looked for news.

Every report, false or true, was eagerly caught up. Sometimes she was filled with hope; at other times a great dread overwhelmed her. Now they said the cholera was rapidly abating; then it was confidently asserted that it was spreading. A case was reported in the general hospital, but it proved not to be cholera. A few days after, it was again confidently stated that there had been three cases in the town, and that all had ended fatally. They were the drivers of bullock-carts, that had come into the town with grain.

It was true at last, and could not be denied. The disease had been brought into the town, and a week later the melancholy news went abroad that it was raging in some of the narrow crowded by-streets round the rock.

Percy reappeared, looking anxious and troubled.

"I could not stop it," he said. "It came down upon the village one night, and struck men and women right and left. They died like sheep, and we had the greatest difficulty in getting the bodies buried and burnt. I had to make my own servants help to do it."

"And now it is actually in the town?"

"Yes; I came back directly I heard of it."

Percy had his hands full. The disease was of a very virulent type, and was sweeping away whole families. Large fires were kept burning in the open spaces of the town to purify the atmosphere. Extra surgeons and apothecaries were sent in answer to the civil surgeon's earnest appeal to the Government. Sulphur and other disinfectants were served out with a liberal hand. Unwholesome fruit, bad fish, rotten rice, and stale vegetables were seized in the market and rigorously condemned. Yet the death-rate increased.

It fastened upon the jail; it attacked the native regiments and hurried them out into camp. The servants in the cantonment suffered. One of Anderson's horse-keepers groomed his horse in the morning before his master's eye. The wife went out as usual to cut grass, and returned at mid-day to find him rolling in agony on the stable floor. By five in the afternoon she was bewailing her widowhood, whilst his body was being prepared for the burning ground. Anderson could not take his usual morning ride the next day because poor Ragoo was dead, and there was no one to saddle Black Prince.

Zelma saw very little of Percy. He had no time for pleasure. Morning, noon and night he and the doctors were battling with the fell disease, fighting with the aid

of scientific weapons, of medicines and disinfectants. The people had their method of warring against the plague. They propitiated the dreaded goddess Karli with sacrifice and offering. They carried her image in procession through the infected streets at night; the cholera horn and tom-toms sounded incessantly. Zelma, standing at her window, could see the lurid light of the torches reflected upon the trees, as the processions slowly passed down the road. Sometimes they carried a dead body to the burning ground, and the wails of the mourners mingled with the funereal beat of the drum.

"I cannot bear to leave the house," cried Zelma, distressed beyond measure, as her father urged her to go out as usual to play tennis or ride.

"We must not give way to morbid feeling," he said, "or we shall court the sickness we dread. Fright alone is sufficient sometimes to bring about the terrible catastrophe."

At last the long deferred rains came down, saving the land from famine, though they could not repair the damage wrought by disease. The land was washed clean, the air purified. The north-east breeze blew freshly over the stricken town, and the cholera ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun.

Percy, relieved from the great strain, breathed again. Not only was the disease rapidly disappearing, but all fear of famine was also gone. The crops and the cattle were saved.

One morning, as Zelma and her father were going out for their usual morning ride, they heard the clatter of hoofs behind them. Looking round they saw Percy riding up, his face bright once more with something like his old smile.

"At last I can join you again," he said. "I think the worst is over, and my mind may rest easy about the future."

They greeted him warmly.

"How lucky we are not to have lost any Europeans this time. I have never known so severe an attack pass over the place before without one or two Europeans falling victims," said Anderson.

The civilian looked serious.

"We are not quite out of the wood," he replied. "There is yet time. The great feasts at the temple of Srirungam have yet to take place. We may have another outburst with the influx of pilgrims. There are several thousand every year; and, in spite of all the warnings they receive to keep away, they persist in coming."

"Christmas will be a very quiet time with us this year," said Zelma presently.

"It is just as well; it is not safe for

visitors to come into the place with their servants and servants' followers. It is they who suffer, and it is hard that they should die for our pleasure."

"Come, let us gallop," said Anderson.

"I always say that the less we speak and think of cholera the better."

Away the trio flew through the fresh morning air. Anderson and Percy were both in exuberant spirits. They were more like boys together than care-laden men. They laughed and joked with the pleasant familiarity of old friends, as though life were all happiness. Zelma, too, caught the infection of their joyousness. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks grew rosy with the exercise, as she joined in the hearty laugh.

It happened to be a native holiday. Anderson's office was closed, and Percy was not wanted at the cutcherry.

"Come in to breakfast," said Anderson, as Percy was about to leave them as usual after the ride.

He hesitated a moment, and then said,—

"Yes, I will. I really don't see why I should not take a half holiday. It is long since I have had one."

He rode in with them, and Zelma never forgot the pleasure that lighted up her father's face as he led the way into the house. He called to old Anthony to get breakfast, and pulling the Holland cover off

the billiard-table, challenged his guest to a game. As Zelma came down the stairs in her white morning dress, to which she had changed, she heard the click of the billiard balls as the two men played, and the murmur of their voices mingled with the splash of the fountain. For years afterwards the click of the ivory balls on the green cloth brought back the memory of the happiness of that morning.

They breakfasted together, and lingered over the cheroots that followed with all the pleasure of a rare holiday. Then Percy went home. Although it was a holiday for the clerks, he had much to do. Letters had been neglected of late, and a huge pile of unanswered documents lay on his table, awaiting his attention.

Neither was Anderson wholly idle. He, too, had correspondence to attend to.

In the evening Zelma and her father dined out with some friends. It was a small party, just the kind of entertainment Anderson liked. They returned home in good time, and, after the usual good-night, Zelma went to her room.

How long she had been asleep she did not know, but she was suddenly aroused by the sound of voices downstairs. She raised her head and listened, and could distinctly hear some of her own servants talking in subdued but excited tones.

She got up quickly, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and went out into the corridor. The big hall and staircase were lighted faintly by a lamp which hung over the fountain. This lamp burnt all night, and was only put out at daybreak.

Looking over the balustrade, she saw servants moving rapidly to and fro. The door of her father's room was ajar, and a light was burning within. She ran quickly down the stairs, and entered the room.

Her father, with white face and drawn features, was lying back on his pillow in pain.

"What is it, father? What is the matter?" asked the frightened girl.

He raised his hand to stop her from coming any nearer. By a great effort he lifted himself in the bed and spoke.

"Go away, my darling; don't be alarmed. I shall be all right in the morning. I have sent for the doctor, and he will soon set me straight. Go to bed, my child, and come to me in the morning."

Her fears were allayed, and she did as she was told. As she left the room Anthony met her. He was bringing mustard and a jug of hot water. He gave her a startled look, but, glancing at his master through the open door, he read something in his face which told him to be careful how he raised her fears.

"You are taking care of master, I hope, Anthony?" she said.

"Yes, missy. Master soon be all right again. Missy go to bed."

At that moment a carriage drove up. It was Anderson's own brougham, and out of it stepped the civil surgeon.

"How is your father, Miss Anderson?" he asked, as he walked quickly into the house.

"I hardly know," she replied. "I am only just awake. I saw my father a few moments ago. He looked pale and ill, but he told me to go to bed."

The doctor guessed at once that she knew nothing.

"Your father is quite right. You can do no good by sitting up. I will go in and see him at once."

"And I will wait here till you come and tell me how he is," said Zelma.

In less than five minutes the doctor returned.

"Mr Anderson seems to be suffering from a sharp bilious attack. I hope he will soon be better and able to sleep. He begs me to tell you not to sit up or be anxious. If you will go to bed now, and get some sleep, you will be all the more fit to wait on him to-morrow if he needs nursing."

All this was said very gently and quietly. It allayed Zelma's anxiety, and sent her to bed happy.

"I am so glad to hear what you say. For the moment, I began to fear that he was going to have that horrible cholera," she said.

The doctor smiled curiously.

"Your father tells me that he has been dining out," he said. "He has probably eaten of a dish that was prepared from tinned food, which has upset him."

"Then you are going home again?"

"Presently; and now, Miss Anderson, let me persuade you to go to bed at once. As soon as you wake in the morning, you will, I hope, find your father well."

"She returned to her room. The moment she was out of sight, the doctor hastened back to Anderson's room. He scribbled a note to summon one of the other surgeons of the place. Just as Zelma was dropping off into the sleep of healthy youth, she heard the carriage roll away again.

"The doctor has left father, so there cannot be much the matter," she thought.

The house grew quiet, and she fell into a deep slumber.

In the room below a fight was going on between life and death. Both patient and doctor knew what they had to deal with. Anderson was seized with cholera, and nothing but the most vigorous and careful nursing could save him.

The carriage brought the second doctor,

and, after a short consultation between the two men, it went for a nurse, an experienced Englishwoman living in the outskirts of the town.

It was by Anderson's own wish that the terrible news was withheld from his daughter. There would be risk from infection if she were allowed to stay in the room. Her agitation would be distressing to witness, and probably hinder the patient in his recovery. She could do nothing more than was already being done. It had been the greatest relief to the doctor to see her go quietly to her room without a suspicion that a hand to hand fight with death was about to take place in the room below.

It was two hours since Anderson had been taken ill. Fortunately he knew enough about the symptoms of cholera to recognise the fact that he was threatened, and he had sent at once for medical aid. In spite of all the treatment and nursing, they could not check it. Whilst his daughter slept so peacefully through the small hours of the night, the poor father was rolling in the agonies of cramp, stifling his cries of pain in his pillows lest his daughter should be startled from her sleep. Large drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and a burning thirst consumed him within.

Mrs Anderson was also left in total ignorance of what was going on. She was

sleeping in her closely-shut room, her women lying in the ante-room, wrapped like herself in the deep slumber induced by the sweet nutty poppyseeds that enriched their vegetable curries.

The two doctors, the nurse, Anthony, and two or three helpful menservants, worked quietly and indefatigably the whole night through. At five in the morning, just before dawn, their unremitting labours were rewarded by the cessation of all symptoms of the disease.

"Now, if he only has vitality enough left in him to rally, we shall pull him through," said the doctors, happy in the thought that they had so far triumphed.

But Anderson was terribly exhausted. He was left almost pulseless, and as weak as a babe. He scarcely seemed aware of what was going on, and made no attempt to move or speak. They continued the application of mustard and turpentine to his cold, clammy body, and put hot bottles along his nerveless limbs to keep up the feeble circulation of the blood. Chicken broth and champagne were poured down his throat as often as possible.

At daybreak the little electric bell by Anderson's bedside rang.

The wearied doctors looked up in surprise, but Anthony stepped forward and said, in low tones, "Missy."

The sick man heard the sound of the bell, and opened his eyes for a second. He fixed them on Doctor Stone, the civil surgeon, with an appealing glance, and his lips moved. The doctor leaned over him ; "Tell her," he whispered.

The doctor knew that it was useless to attempt to keep her in ignorance any longer. He left the room, and ran up to Zelma's door. He knocked and called her by name.

"Miss Anderson, I want to speak to you," he said.

The door was flung open, and Zelma stood before him, in her white, lace-trimmed dressing-gown. The rosy flush of sleep was still upon her cheeks, and her dishevelled hair floated round her shoulders in a luxuriant mass of golden brown. But the doctor had no time to notice her beauty.

"Miss Anderson, your father is not so well this morning, I am sorry to say. He sent me to give you news of him."

"I will come down at once," she replied.

Doctor Stone laid his hand upon her arm.

"You must not go to him just yet," he said, in a low voice. "He has had a sharp attack of cholera, and just at present it is best you should keep away. The disease has been arrested, but it has left him terribly weak."

She gazed at the doctor in an incredulous manner.

"You must be mistaken," she gasped. "You said it was something he had eaten at dinner which had disagreed with him."

Doctor Stone was sorry for her, but he saw no use in disguising the truth.

"There has been no mistake. I sent for Doctor Day, and we have been with your father all night. Mrs Swan, the nurse, is also here. Everything that could be done has been done."

"Why was not I told?" said Zelma angrily.

Even now, she did not realise the import of his words.

"It would have been useless," he replied gently. "It was absolutely necessary that we should keep your father as quiet as possible; and it seemed to calm him to know that you were peacefully sleeping above, instead of uselessly watching and weeping outside his room all night. Believe me, Miss Anderson, it has been all for the best."

The doctor looked anxiously into her face. He would have liked to have seen tears instead of that stony face and those hard, glittering eyes.

"May I see him?" she asked.

"Not just yet. We want to keep him perfectly quiet for the present, and to guard against the slightest agitation or excitement," said the doctor.

"Will he die?"

"God only knows. If he has strength to fight against the terrible weakness in which he now lies, he will get well. We have nothing more to fear from the disease itself; it is over."

The doctor, who had had plenty of experience, not only with the patients but with their distracted friends, knew that the best medicine for her would be occupation, so he said,—

"Will you dress yourself, Miss Anderson, as quickly as you can, and see that breakfast is prepared for us. We have been up all night, and want food. Anthony is needed in the sick-room, so you must manage without him."

Just as he was leaving, a terrible shriek resounded through the house; Zelma darted forward.

"My mother!" she exclaimed.

"Where is she?" asked the doctor.

She pointed to the purdah on the opposite side of the corridor.

"Who has told her? Some foolish servant, I suppose," said Doctor Stone impatiently. "She must not come to her husband's room just now; an interview might kill him on the spot."

"My mother will not venture down. I will go to her at once."

She passed under the curtain, and the doctor returned to his patient.

Zelma found her mother rolling in uncontrolled grief on her pillows, crying out that she was a widow, and giving way to an extravagant sorrow, which was distressing to witness. Two or three of her women added their moaning to hers, and the place was filled with the sound of wailing. When Mrs Anderson saw Zelma, she got up and ran towards her, flung her arms round her, and rocked her to and fro.

“Ahmonee! your father is dead! The sickness has killed him! Ah yō! ah yō!”

The last syllable was wailed out in one long sad cry of grief. The girl preserved her presence of mind in the face of such demonstrative sorrow, because she did not realise the catastrophe as yet; she added no cry to her mother's, and the hot glistening eyes shed no tears.

Mrs Anderson unclasped her arms from Zelma's waist, and dropped down upon the floor, quiet again. Then one of the women raised her voice, and recommenced the wailing. In vain Zelma tried to soothe them. It was useless. At last, wearied with her efforts, she moved towards the door. Her mother showed no sign of going to the sick-room, and Zelma did not think that it was likely she would attempt to do so. It was more likely that she would assemble her relatives, and indulge to the utmost in the luxury of grief.

Returning to her room, she dressed herself with deliberate care. Her brain was phenomenally alive to detail under the crushing blow it had received. The trembling ayah watched her fearfully as she helped her to dress; and when she touched her mistress's cold hand she started back, asking if she might fetch her some brandy. Her toilette finished, Zelma went down to the dining-room, where breakfast was laid.

Doctor Stone was already there, pouring himself out a cup of hot coffee. He glanced at her uneasily.

"Let me do that for you," she said, taking the coffee-pot from his hands.

She filled a cup for herself as well, helped herself to some toast, and ate mechanically.

Presently the other doctor came in and took his place at the table. In silence she poured out coffee for him; she made no remark, and except for doing the honours of the breakfast-table in a dreamy fashion, she seemed hardly aware of their presence. The two men looked at each other, and then whispered a word or two. Doctor Stone asked her if she would like to see her father. She gave him a sudden startled glance, and sprang from her chair.

"You will try to be very quiet, Miss Anderson?" he said, as he rose to leave the room.

"Yes, yes!" she answered feverishly.

The doctor walked slowly, to give her time to collect herself. He opened the bedroom door and entered softly; Zelma followed.

On the bed lay the shadow of Anderson's former self. In seven short hours the steady flame of his life had been brought down to a flickering spark, which a breath might extinguish. His eyes were closed, his white hands rested on the sheet, and with his right he now and then plucked feebly at the bed-clothes.

As his daughter approached, he opened his eyes, and turned them upon her with a faint smile of recognition. She dropped on her knees by his side, and stifled the moan that would have escaped her lips with her handkerchief. The doctor leaned over her, and whispered,—

“For your father's sake, control yourself.”

He wished to open the fount of her tears, but did not want any disturbing exhibition of grief to take place in the room.

She rose, and, bending over the sick man, pressed a passionate kiss upon his brow. Then, turning away, she rushed from the room, never stopping till she had reached her own bed, where she flung herself in agony.

Now that she had seen him, she realised what had happened, and she knew that he

was at death's door. With a face almost as white as her father's, she remained motionless until a cool, tender hand was placed upon her brow. The kind-hearted doctor had followed her upstairs, fearing lest his services might be needed for the daughter as well as the father. If he could only open the fountain of her tears, the hot, maddened brain would be relieved. Very gently he spoke to her.

"You must not look upon the dark side. We may yet pull your father through. There is every hope for him now that the disease is conquered. You must not give way to despair; we want to keep you well and strong, so as to be able to nurse him when he is convalescent. I hope we shall soon have him asking for his dear daughter."

The girl writhed in anguish, and moaned. The doctor went on,—

"He has been so brave throughout it all, bearing the pain so nobly, and helping us so manfully to fight. 'I must live,' I heard him murmur once in the night; 'I must live, for my dear child's sake.' You were in his thoughts all the time. He smothered the cries of pain which were wrung from him now and then, lest you should hear them and be disturbed."

The kind tone of the doctor touched her heart. A great sob shook her frame,

and the welcome tears came with a great rush.

"Now her brain is safe," he said to himself. He talked on a little while longer, and then left her that she might weep out her sorrow. By-and-by the weeping abated, and her thoughts became more collected. The ayah brought her some warm broth and a glass of champagne, "sent by the doctor's orders." She heard a carriage come and go now and then, and the feet of friends and servants passing through the hall. Once she crept down to the door of the sick-room, and asked with trembling lips for news.

"He is sleeping. We hope he is better."

With that she had to be content. She returned to her sitting-room, where she could settle to no occupation. She chafed at her inability to help her father, at the impossibility of doing him any good.

CHAPTER V.

A FAIR SUPPLIANT.

"Let no vain idol in my heart set up its rebel throne,
Where Thou, Oh, King of Kings, should'st reign alone."
Old Hymn.

BEFORE mid-day the terrible news had spread through the cantonment that Anderson had been stricken down with cholera. It was a shock to all, and to none more than to Percy. The clerks of the office arrived as usual to commence their work, but were dismissed; a trustworthy servant was stationed at the gateway of the compound to answer anxious inquiries, and prevent a rush of people to the house.

The doctors, who had been up all night, drove away to their respective houses; and a third came in to watch over the sick man. Mrs Stainer also arrived and sought Zelma in her own room. The girl was overwhelmed with passionate grief. She could not listen to the consoling words Mrs Stainer tried to

pour into her ears. She refused to be comforted, and the presence of her friend only seemed to add to her sorrow. Mrs Beaumont and Minnie tried to raise her from her despair. But it was useless, besides being extremely painful to all. They decided that it would be wiser and kinder to let her alone. No one could help her; the poor girl must grapple single-handed with her grief.

It was a great relief to doctors and nurse that Mrs Anderson remained in her room, and did not seek her husband. News was taken to her by her own messengers every half-hour or so; but it was always the same.

Zelma went to her mother once or twice, but every time she was obliged to witness the most painful abandonment to grief; and she shrank from it as something beyond her endurance.

As the day waned she went down again to her father's room, and begged to be admitted. He was asleep or unconscious; it was hard to say which. She looked at him for a few moments; and feeling distrustful of her own composure, she turned and left him. Doctor Stone followed her out. As he closed the door softly behind him, she said,—

“Doctor Stone, can nothing be done? Must we sit still and see my father die by inches? We all seem paralysed and useless. Can I do nothing? I, who love him so

dearly ; who would so willingly give my own life for his."

"Everything is being done, Miss Anderson, that human aid can do," replied the doctor. "It rests with a higher power than ours to bring success to our efforts. You can pray for your father, and ask God to bless the means we use."

The girl eagerly seized upon his words, and the good man saw that he had found something to soothe her soul. Here was something to be done, something which would benefit her father. And if she found comfort in it, why should not her mother do the same ?

She hurried to Mrs Anderson's room, impulsively, and cried,—

"Mother ! do not lie here weeping on the floor. Let us do something for father. We can pray for him. We can cry to the Great God above, and ask Him to have mercy upon us, and spare our dear one."

An inspired look came over the face of the girl as she spoke, and her mother stopped moaning to gaze at her. She caught at the idea as eagerly as her daughter, and raising herself, she said,—

"We will, Ahmonee, my child, we will. I will go at once to the temple."

"You can pray here, mother ; God is everywhere, and can hear you in your chamber as well as in your temple."

"Ah! no! Ahmonee," she replied. "It will be best to go to the temple. And you must go to your own church and pray for him there."

Mrs Anderson had no faith in prayer being efficacious unless it was accompanied by propitiatory offerings to the swami.

Zelma went back to her room. There she fell upon her knees and tried to pray. It was easy enough to say her morning and evening prayers in the language she had used from her childhood.

"God keep my dear father in safety and bless him."

But these words seemed poor and insignificant now that he lay at death's door. She tried to formulate her sentences and pour out a passionate appeal to the Almighty; but her tongue failed her. The words repeated themselves, and sounded cold and spiritless in the turbulence of her emotion. She rose from her knees and walked up and down the room; then knelt again before her God in an agony of entreaty, only to rise distressed at the inadequacy of her words.

The evening brought Percy to the house. It was useless for the servant to tell him that visitors were not admitted. He left his carriage at the gate and walked in uninvited.

Doctor Stone came out to see him.

"I could not keep away," he said; "I

don't want to go into the sickroom, but I was determined to hear from your own lips how he is."

The doctor shook his head.

"He is hanging between life and death. We were hopeful this morning after the symptoms ceased; but he seems unable to rally, although there is great vitality left in him. What we fear now is blood-poisoning and typhoid fever. The organs are torpid and will not act."

Percy was distressed; he said, dejectedly, "I suppose I can do nothing to help."

"You might arrange about the office work," said the doctor. "The clerks were all sent away this morning, but there is a large budget of letters come in by the post this afternoon; someone ought to look through them."

"Is it possible to ask him what he wishes?" said Percy.

"It would be better not to trouble him. You know him more intimately than any of us, and you are therefore the right person to look after his affairs. When the head clerk comes to-morrow morning he shall wait here till you can interview him."

Percy promised to be there.

"I have a lot of work to do just now," he observed. "These heathen feasts are coming on at Srirungam. Thousands of pilgrims are arriving daily, and I fear

another outbreak of cholera. Mayhew is a capital fellow, and has his police well up to the mark.” “

“Are the pilgrims likely to give trouble?” asked Doctor Stone.

“There are the usual number of the two subdivisions of the Vishnuvites, who squabble over their doctrines and their swami marks. The one draws the centre line of the trident down the nose; the other does not. If they begin arguing, they will fight. I am binding over the head men to keep the peace, so I hope all will be right. Colonel Beaumont offers me a company of sepoys if I like; but Mayhew’s police are pretty strong. He wants me to go over to Srirungam, and be on the spot on those particular days when they have any great function.”

“I suppose it will be best,” remarked Doctor Stone.

“Oh, yes; it must be done. We can ride there in the morning, and return in the evening. Have you seen much of Miss Anderson? How does she take her trouble, poor girl?”

“Hardly, very hardly,” replied the doctor compassionately. “She is terribly distressed; but she has found relief in tears. Her presence in the room is undesirable for many reasons, and I am so thankful that she does not insist on nursing her father.”

“Where is she?”

"Upstairs in her room. She comes down now and then to inquire for her father, looking so beautiful, and so utterly dejected and sad, that she makes my heart ache for her every time I see her."

Percy considered a moment whether he should ask to see her, or wait till the following day. He decided to wait, and was about to go, when the nurse came out into the hall where the two men were talking.

"The gentleman is asking to see Mr Bell. I think he must have recognised his voice."

Doctor Stone went in, and found his patient awake. There was an anxious look on his face, and in low, faint tones he said,—

"Percy Bell?"

"He is here. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes."

Percy came in, and walked to the bedside. He looked down at the poor, wasted, stricken form through a sudden mist of sorrow; and his heart was wrung for the girl's sake upstairs, as well as for his poor old friend. He sat down by Anderson's side, and laid his hand on one of his. The sick man fixed his eyes on him and said,—

"Zelma! You will marry her when I am gone—take her away—from India—separate her from her mother.—Tell her I wish it."

He stopped, and Percy said,

"I know your wishes, Anderson ; and will carry them out faithfully. But dear old friend, we mean to pull you through, and have you amongst us again."

Percy felt the fingers he held feebly close round his.

"It is not to be—I am dying. I leave my daughter and my wealth in your hands."

His voice grew fainter, and he closed his eyes.

"I am going to your office now," said Percy, "to look over your letters, and arrange work for to-morrow."

Another faint pressure of the fingers told Percy that Anderson was satisfied. Then the doctor, who had been watching his patient narrowly, drew the civilian out of the room.

"That is all he can bear," he said.

"I am afraid he has given up all hope of himself," and Percy's voice shook as he spoke.

"Every hour that passes is lessening his chance, for there is no improvement in his condition. However, one never knows till death actually comes how it is going to end."

The next morning found Anderson no better and apparently no worse. Zelma, who had cried herself to sleep, awoke with a determination to do something definite. Her mother's words had been ringing in her

ears, "You must go to your own church and pray for him there." She dressed herself quickly, forming her plans as she dressed. She went twice to her father's room, each time to find him lying with his eyes closed. Once she pressed a gentle kiss upon his brow; he looked up at her when he felt the warm lips, and smiled. Then, closing his eyes again, he relapsed into quiet sleep or unconsciousness.

Zelma ordered her carriage, and without saying anything of her journey, drove off to the chaplain's house.

He was not at home; he had gone to the church, the servants said. Thither she followed him. She walked straight into the vestry where he was sitting, with two large register books before him, filling up some forms.

"Mr Brown, I want to speak to you," she said abruptly.

He started, and seeing that it was Zelma, stood up, expecting to be told the sad news of her father's death.

"Miss Anderson, I hope—" he began.

She interrupted him impatiently.

"You know how ill my father is. They are doing all they can to restore him to life and health, but their efforts will be of no use unless we pray for him."

The young man regarded her with the profoundest sympathy. He said soothingly,—

"God hears the earnest prayer of His people for the sick. If you have prayed, Miss Anderson; He will not turn a deaf ear to your petition."

"I have prayed," said the girl in a half whisper. "I have poured out my whole soul in prayer, but I seem so powerless. My prayer is so poor; I am too much overwhelmed with my own grief to reach the Almighty: I have come to ask you to pray," and she laid her hand upon his arm.

"I have done so already. Your father has been a good friend to me in my work. I have asked God to spare his life to us."

"But it has been of no use," cried Zelma. "He is no better. God has not heard us. He is not satisfied with such feeble little prayers; we must call louder upon Him, or He will be angry with our half-heartedness, our lukewarmness. He will not believe that we mean what we say."

Poor Mr Brown looked distressed beyond measure at these semi-heathenish sentiments which fell from the lips of the impulsive, distracted girl.

"There is nothing more to be done but to have patience and faith, and to submit to the Divine will," he said. "Go back to your chamber, Miss Anderson, and pray that you may have patience and faith."

"I will not! I cannot!" she cried. "Did not Christ Himself tell us to use im-

portunity? *'Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him.'* We must *'ask,' 'seek,' 'knock.'* Come, now, into the church with me. Put on your vestments; let us have an intercessory service. Let us *'ask,' 'seek,'* and *'knock'* together, and send up such a cry to God to spare my father's life as shall resound through Heaven. Come, now!"

The young clergyman was bewildered and shocked. Her passion overpowered and alarmed him. He did not in the least understand the Oriental strain in her nature, which circumstances were now exhibiting. Nor would he have understood David, when he fasted and mourned in sackcloth and ashes for his child, and sent up such a despairing cry to God. The fiery haste to entreat the Almighty whilst there was time, the craving for active earnest importunity, the desire to approach the Throne at her own time, and in her own way, seemed to him rebellion against the Divine will. His decorous sense of reverence was offended, but he said gently,—

"Grief has distracted you, Miss Anderson, and you do not know what you are saying. Shall I come to your father's bedside?"

"No! no! It is not he who would pray for his own life. He is too ill, too weak; it is for us, the strong and healthy, to entreat

God for his life. Oh! come now to the altar, and let us pray."

The chaplain allowed the girl to lead him into the church—she said nothing more of his vestments. Without giving him time to collect his thoughts, she went straight to the altar rails, where they knelt together.

"Pray!" she said.

He began in a confused way; but finding that memory failed him in the strangeness of the whole proceeding, he got up and fetched himself a prayer book from one of the choir desks.

Turning to the office for the visitation of the sick, he read some of the prayers in a low, subdued tone. Zelma bent her head in an agony of entreaty, waiting for the words which would lift her request to heaven. But, as Mr Brown read on, she raised herself unrestfully, and at last exclaimed,—

"You are praying for his soul. Pray for his body. His soul is pure and good enough, God knows! It is his body that is sick."

He turned the leaves of his prayer-book, troubled beyond measure, and began the Litany. After reverently repeating the invocation, he selected certain of the obsecrations that follow, and adapted them as well as he was able to the needs of the case.

"By Thy Cross and Passion, by Thine Agony and bloody Sweat, spare us, Good Lord," he said.

"Spare him!" she echoed passionately by his side.

"That it may please Thee to bless and keep all Thy people;" he prayed.

"Spare him!" she cried.

"That it may please Thee to have mercy upon all sick persons."

"Spare him!" she said again, in such heartrending accents as almost unnerved Mr Brown.

"Son of God, we beseech Thee to hear us."

"Spare him!"

"Oh! Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world."

"Spare him!"

"Lord have mercy upon us."

"Spare him!"

"Christ have mercy upon us."

"Spare him!"

"Lord have mercy upon us."

"Spare him!"

"Our Father, which art in Heaven Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven—"

But she could not repeat the Lord's Prayer; she could not say, "Thy will be done." The clergyman finished the prayer alone; and when he had ceased she clasped her hands above her head, raised her eyes upwards, and, in a thrilling voice, cried,—

“Oh, Christ, as Thou hast suffered, spare my father!”

Then, without another word, she rose and moved away towards the door.

He never forgot that moment! He stood awed and silenced in the presence of an uncontrolled grief, of which his own well-tutored heart had hitherto had no experience. Tears stood in his eyes as he watched her disappear through one of the great open doors; dropping again on his knees, he lifted his soul to God to ask that his suffering sister might have strength to bear her cross.

Zelma drove straight home. Her eyes were fixed on the landscape, but she saw nothing of the fresh green grass and delicate emerald leaves of the acacia. The blue jay flashed its azure wings in the morning sun; the kingcrow, with forked tail and glossy black plumage, wheeled and circled in its flight after the buzzing insects, the butterflies fluttered in and out amongst the acacia blossom in the beauty and maturity of their second birth. But her eyes were blind to the wealth of the tropical loveliness around her; and her heart was dead within her. She was not satisfied with the result of her visit to the church. The prayer had no more fire and importunity than the priest.

The one was as quiet and as humble as the other. Both preached dependence upon the Divine will, instead of deprecating and

struggling against it, as her present mood prompted her to do.

On reaching the house, she went to her father's room, but only to hear the same answer as before. He was much the same; no change had taken place. He took food and wine, was in no pain, and slept most of the time. She entered the room very quietly, and sat down where she could watch him. How still he lay! The clothes heaved regularly as his breath went and came. Except for the wasted form and pallid face, she could have imagined him in the refreshing sleep of health. The nurse sat watching also; the only sound was that of the clock on the table, which ticked loudly in the silence of the room. If only God would restore his health, she thought. Might he not at this moment begin to revive? How helpless they all seemed waiting there! How miserably she had failed in the one thing which was left for her to do!

By-and-by she got up, and crept away quietly. She wanted to learn what her mother had done, and went to her room to find her. It was empty, and a servant told her that the mistress was gone to Srirungam. She wondered how her mother prospered, and whether her quest would be as profitless as her own had been.

A mad desire possessed her to join her mother, and look on with sympathy, if she

could not actually take part in her prayers. Surely it was the same God they were entreating. They only had different methods of approach.

Zelma went back to her sitting-room to walk restlessly to and fro, or sink into her chair in a fit of weeping. She tried to eat some breakfast, but the food choked her.

After breakfast, a note was brought to her. It was from Percy, to say that he had been busy in her father's office, and was about to go back to his own work, which could not be neglected. Would she like to see him before he left?

It was impossible; she could not bear it. His love and pity would overthrow what little self-control she had.

She wrote on a slip of paper,—

"I cannot see you; it would be more than I could bear."

In answer she received these words,—

"My darling, be brave. Send for me when you want me. Hope still for the best."

Comforting as these few lines might have been in a lesser grief, they fell on a deadened heart now; she could think nothing of the lover whilst her idolised father was dying.

In the evening her mother returned, and with her came Rutnam and his mother. They had been at the temple all day, and Mrs Anderson was tired. Zelma found her lying upon her cushions with closed eyes,

a low moan escaping now and then from her lips. She spoke to her, but received no answer.

"Your mother is exhausted by what she has gone through to-day," said Rutnam quietly.

Zelma looked up at the Brahmin. He was dressed in a dark suit of European clothes, and wore a turban. Always susceptible to appearances, the girl was struck with his general bearing. He looked at her mother compassionately, whatever he may have felt, and his quiet demeanour and gentle voice fell gratefully on her ear. Doubtless for the moment he did feel for the prostrate woman, his own kith and kin, at his feet, and he was prepared to throw himself into the mood of the sorrow-stricken mother and daughter. He had his own reasons for doing so. There was a deep underlying purpose in his very presence there at such a time which they could not suspect.

"Have you been to the temple with mother?" asked Zelma.

"Yes," he replied. "We have sent up our prayers together to God. May He bless our petitions, and grant us what we have asked."

She gave him a grateful look.

"I have been to church;" there was a dejected ring in her words, and Rutnam glanced sharply at her.

"But you have not found consolation?" he asked, his mind working rapidly with all the subtlety of his nature.

"No; my father's religion seems cold and unresponsive. I found it impossible to raise my soul to God in the precise formal language of our Church."

He let a few seconds elapse before replying. During that time, she thought she perceived his fully-aroused sympathy.

"You should have been with us," he said, watching to see the effect of his words.

They were curiously in harmony with her own unprompted thoughts of the morning.

"Perhaps I should," acquiesced Zelma. "Since you have shown me your religion in a new light, it does not seem impossible that I might stand by my mother's side and pray with her."

Rutnam's eye sparkled. The one object he held dearest in life was the aggrandisement of his own religion, and the enrichment of his temple. He was ready at any moment to seize opportunity, and bend fate to his will. He resolved to make an attempt now to win the rich merchant's daughter and her wealth. If he failed, he could try again, and where persuasion did not succeed, craft might.

"Miss Anderson, will you come with us to-morrow morning, and be present at the great function we have arranged on behalf of your father's recovery?"

Mrs Anderson heard the words, and ceased moaning. She raised herself from her pillows, and burst forth into voluble speech.

"Ah, my daughter ! Let us both go together, before the Great God, and entreat him to save our dear one's life. To-morrow there is a big festival. I have given money and jewels ; even my own clothes I have laid before the god that he may be merciful. Oh ! come with me and we will pray together."

Nothing could have aided Rutnam's plans more than this unpremeditated appeal from the mother to the daughter, at a time when a common grief had drawn them close together. He looked at Zelma with an anxiety he could not hide.

Would she spurn her heathen mother's temptation, or would she seek another means of approaching the God of mercy she could not find ?

"I cannot come as one of you ; but I can be there as a silent spectator," she replied.

"You will not be silent, Ahmonee, when the great cry goes up to God," said her mother. "Thousands will be there, and it will not be the single cry of a poor feeble woman that will ascend ; the air will be rent by the voice of a great multitude, a voice which will shake the sky and awake the mercy of God."

Was not this the very thing which her

soul had been craving for, and which she had failed to find within the Church? Rutnam noted the hesitation and the awakening light on her face; he added his voice of persuasion to her mother's.

"Why should you be tied only to the religion of your father? Surely that of your mother has some claim upon you? You may at least sympathise with, and even join in, your mother's prayers."

For fully an hour he pleaded, pouring into willing ears the specious plausible arguments he had used before. He asked her to look into the future. Would she and her father be separated for ever in the spirit from the mother who had formed part of their lives? After death, who could say how they would approach the Almighty? Would it matter then whether their prayers to Him had been sent up in the incense of the church or in the incense of the temple?

Her mother added her entreaties, and, when Zelma left, it was with a promise to go to Srirungam the next day. Without a thought that she was sinning against the very God Whom she would worship, she consented to take part in a heathen festival. It is true that she had no knowledge nor conception of what she was consenting to. She was ignorant of temple ways, and of the temple rites. Rutnam had so skilfully hidden the reality of the idol, and of the

idolatry practised, that she gave it no thought, and could not even recognise the worship at Srirungam by its right name.

In the simplicity of her heart, she was leaving no stone unturned, no way untried, to save her father's life.

She went down to his room for a last look at him before going to bed. The nurse and doctor let her in, telling her the same thing as before. He was no better, no worse; whilst there was life, there was hope.

If Zelma had been less occupied with her all-absorbing thought of saving her father's life,—to which she clung in desperation,—she would have noticed that the doctor no longer spoke cheerfully. He considered it unnecessary to distress her by telling her that it was now a mere matter of time. He would be able to call her in at the last moment when she was wanted, and until then she had better be sustained with hope, even though it might be false. The girl had suffered enough, and Doctor Stone shrank from dealing her another blow before it was absolutely necessary.

She stood by her father's bedside a few moments, and then kissed him, murmuring,—

"I am going to pray for you, dear father."

Her voice seemed to awake him out of a stupor.

"Good-by, my child," he whispered; and, with a wearied sigh, he sank back into what seemed a gentle sleep.

She gazed down upon him through the rapidly gathering tears, and went to her room, where she ate her solitary dinner before retiring to rest.



CHAPTER VI.

GODS AND DEVILS.

“Superstition is related to this life, religion to the next; superstition is allied to fatality, religion to virtue; it is by the vivacity of earthly doctrines that we become superstitious; it is, on the contrary, by the sacrifice of those desires that we become religious.”—MADAME DE STAËL.

As Zelma dropped the purdah of Mrs Anderson's room behind her, Rutman's whole face was illumined with triumph. He looked down on the prostrate woman at his feet, but, seeing that it would be useless to ask her assistance, he turned to his mother, who stood near, a watchful listener of all that had passed. He moved away into the next room and beckoned to her to follow him. In low, earnest tones, he unfolded the plot which his ready brain had woven during the last hour. The old woman was quick to take directions. She asked no questions, but accepted just so much information as Rutnam chose to impart. When he had finished, he said,—

“What hope is there of his recovery?”

"None," replied his mother, without hesitation. "He will linger till this time to-morrow, and then he will die."

There was no regret on the face of the Brahmin now as he listened to these words. The look of pity which had roused Zelma's confidence was gone; and his thoughts were concentrated on the one end he had in view. Anderson had never held out the hand of friendship to him, or recognised his relationship. It was unlikely, therefore, that he should feel any real regret at the Scotchman's illness. On the contrary, it was convenient that he should die.

Rutnam took a key out of his pocket.

"To-night, when she"—he pointed with his thumb in the direction of Zelma's room—"is in her first deep sleep of fatigue and grief, you will go to her room and open the jewel safe. You have done it before for practice; now you will do it for my purpose. Bring away some of the jewels—not all, but just so many as she might wear at once. I must have the Alexandrite, the string of pearls, and the large diamond necklace and bracelets."

The old woman looked questioningly into his face. She loved her son dearly, and had infinite faith in his wisdom and judgment. But she was not prepared to commit a large robbery by herself. He answered her look with impatient words.

“You are not asked to steal the jewels. You will take them out lest she should forget them, and we will clasp them on her neck and arms just before she enters the temple.”

The old woman's face cleared again.

Rutnam continued,—

“You will come in the carriage with them, so you can easily bring the jewels, and hand them to me on arrival.”

He gave her a few final directions, and left the house in his usual unobtrusive manner. His mother remained for the night with Mrs Anderson.

No. Rutnam did not intend to steal the jewels like an ordinary thief. He had a much bolder project in his mind. He meant to secure the fair owner, the beautiful wearer of the gems. He hoped to be able to draw her into a private house within the temple with her mother, where he would have both the jewels and her within his power. Zelma was the daughter of a Brahmin woman. The crafty care of the mother had saved the girl from the imprint of the Cross, which should have enrolled her in the body of Christians. There was no reason why she should not receive somewhat the same privileges of caste afforded to her mother. By persuasion, or if necessary by force, she should join her mother's people, and perhaps embrace their religion; and bring that enor-

mous wealth, which would probably be hers in a few hours, into the coffers of the temple.

If she resisted? Well, of what use would it be? A liberal Government protected the rights of the temple. If none but Brahmins saw her enter, none others would ever know she was there. In the cause of religion, the twice-born could keep silence. If Brahmins searched the temple, the search would be ineffectual.

And what if the mother rebelled against the incarceration of her daughter, and refused to claim the wealth?

There would be time to make plans and think over ways and means when the first great step had been taken. The use of drugs was not unknown amongst the large community belonging to the temple, and a few could practise the mysterious art of hypnotism.

Once get possession of the girl, and Rutnam believed that he could work all things to his end, evading the law, and compelling both mother and daughter to his will.

Should he be defeated, he would at least secure the jewels, and a handsome sum as a donation; for the girl was coming of her own free will to the temple to take part in a heathen feast. Rutnam knew in what light idolatry was regarded by the English. Zelma would, when she came to her senses,

be prepared to pay any sum to secure his silence.

It was with a bounding heart of ambitious expectation that he drove along the darkened roads that led to Srirungam.

He went straight to the temple, for there was much to arrange. On the morrow an important festival was to take place. It was the feast day of one of the numerous minor gods that found place in the pantheistic system of the Southern Hindus. He had no power to alter this feast in any way ; or to exclude the crowds that would be anxious to attend. But he could introduce Mrs Anderson's rich offerings with ostentation ; he could insure certain propitiatory chants being sung, which would take the shape of intercessory prayers in the ears of the mother and daughter. It would not be difficult to persuade Zelma that the whole function was being carried out solely on the sick man's account.

He arrived at the temple between eight and nine. The great building—or, rather, assemblage of buildings—was crowded with pilgrims. Those who could find no room in the resthouses within the walls, camped out contentedly under tree or shed, in its vicinity.

Colonel Mayhew's police stood about here and there, near camp fire or lighted stall, stolidly regarding the busy scenes and noisy

crowds, or moving with seemingly deaf ears and blind eyes amongst the people. Two or three European inspectors of police were at the local station, ready to turn out at a moment's notice. The pilgrims individually were a quiet set of people, but the excitement of their religious orgies, together with the intoxicating bhang which they ate, occasionally maddened them into fanaticism, and made them indifferent to their own lives and those of others.

Setting a match to this inflammable human element is but a very small matter ; it might be the result of accident, such as a quarrel between two women in the street. When once the spark is alight, it is extremely difficult to put it out before many heads are broken and harmless individuals robbed and hurt.

At half-past nine in the evening, Percy walked over to Anderson's house to inquire for him. The doctor did not disguise the truth.

"He cannot last over to-morrow, though he may live to see the sun rise and set once more."

"Have you told his daughter?"

"No ; I thought it best to let the poor girl sleep to-night. There will be time enough to tell her in the morning."

"I shall have to go over to Srirungam the very first thing in the morning. If he

asks for me, send a messenger over. I could be with him in an hour's time."

"He will not do that," replied the doctor sadly. "I do not think he can recover consciousness. You can go in and see him now, if you like."

Percy went in, and found it was as the doctor had said. Anderson was unconscious, and nothing but the great vitality of his strong nature bound the spirit still to the worn-out body.

"I can do no good here," said the doctor, as the two men left the room. "I shall lie down and sleep, and let the nurse wake me if anything is wanted."

Percy sorrowfully retraced his steps to his house. As he walked into the compound, Colonel Mayhew rode up hastily.

"Hallo, Mayhew, what's the matter?" exclaimed Percy.

"I have come to see you on business. One of my inspectors has just ridden in from Srirungam with strange news. I am afraid there is going to be a row to-morrow morning in the temple. He doesn't know its nature in the least, although he fancies that the constables have some notion what it will be about; but they dare not speak. All they venture to do is to give us warning that we had better be there in good time."

"It is very strange," said Percy, musing. "I wonder what it can be?"

"They are probably going to carry out some new function, which will send half the worshippers mad with delight, and the other half frantic with rage."

"Is it possible that the Mahomedans are going to interfere, or make objections to any street procession?"

"No, that could hardly be, as the feast to-morrow, the inspector tells me, is confined to the Island; there are no Mahomedans in Srirungam, as you know."

"How many police have you?" asked Percy.

Colonel Mayhew mentioned the number.

"And is it known how many pilgrims have come down this year?"

"Over ten thousand have arrived by rail alone," replied Colonel Mayhew. "And quite as many, if not more, have come by road."

Percy considered for a few moments.

"It is very evident," he said, "that your body of police will not be sufficient to keep order if there is a religious row. I shall go to Colonel Beaumont, and ask him to let me have two companies of sepoys."

"Very well; we will ride over to Srirungam at daybreak. I'll join you here at half-past five. Good-night."

And Colonel Mayhew rode away.

Instead of turning in, Percy set his face from home, this time walking in the direction of Colonel Beaumont's. It was late,

being already past ten ; and he wondered if they would still be up ; for, being early risers, the Beaumonts were in the habit of retiring early.

This evening they were not alone. The house was bright with light, and in the verandah were seated Mr and Mrs Stainer, Miss Seton, Captain and Mrs Bevan, and the good Colonel and his wife.

"What is the matter, Bell ? No one else ill, I hope ?"

"No, no, don't be alarmed. I have only come in to see you on business ; sorry to disturb you all," said Percy, as he shook hands with them and dropped into a chair.

"Have you heard how Mr Anderson is to-night ?" asked Mrs Beaumont.

"I have seen him myself. There is absolutely no hope. Nothing less than a miracle can save him now, poor fellow. The doctor says that he cannot live over to-morrow."

There was a tear in Mrs Beaumont's eyes as she listened. Every one had learnt to like the merchant since his daughter had brought him out amongst them.

"Poor Zelma !" murmured Minnie.
"Have you seen her, Mr Bell ?"

"No," he replied, a little shortly. Somehow he felt disappointed that the girl had not let him comfort her in her trouble. She had not once sent for him, or asked to see

him when he was there ; and, excepting for the one short note, she had not written. It was difficult for him to realise how completely her thoughts were centred on the idolised father to the exclusion of all else.

"We have seen very little of her," said Mrs Stainer. "I have been quite distressed to think that she would not let us be with her, and stand by her through all her trouble."

"There is always the difficulty about her mother," said Minnie. "They are probably a good deal together just now in their common grief; and we are utter strangers to Mrs Anderson. I know she shrinks from coming amongst Europeans."

"There certainly is that difficulty," asserted Percy. "You will be better able to befriend her when she is fatherless, poor child, for her mother is sure to go to her own people when all is over. Zelma will be quite alone."

There was a ring of pity in his voice. A ray of hope passed through him as he spoke, that perhaps he might be permitted to stand at her side as her friend. The thought caused him to relapse into silence. He was roused from his moodiness by Colonel Beaumont.

"You wanted to see me on business, Bell, I think you said. Would you like to come into my room?"

"My business is not private. We can

discuss it here. I am afraid that there is some religious excitement brewing at Srirungam for to-morrow morning. There is to be a big feast, but what they are going to do I cannot tell. I have been warned that I ought to be there. But I shall be of no use without some force at my back. Mayhew's police are not strong enough to restore order if once it is broken. I want you to let me have the two companies you were kind enough to offer."

"I shall be delighted, of course. Is it likely that the troops will be called upon to act?"

"I sincerely hope that there will be no necessity for any violent measures. The mere knowledge that the troops are within hail will keep the people quiet, and enable the police to preserve order," said Percy.

Colonel Beaumont turned to Captain Bevan.

"You had better go with the men yourself, Bevan."

After a little more general conversation, Percy went home.

Miss Seton, who was unaltered, and looked not a day older than when she started off on her travels to Bangalore, listened silently with open ears to what had been said. The mention of a heathen feast set her heart beating. She had been longing intensely to see a real bit of living

idolatry, and the heathen "bowing down to blocks of wood and stone." Now was her opportunity. Here was a chance of seeing some of the mysteries of the great temple with her own eyes.

But after her late escapades and the fear of cholera, Mrs Stainer had thrown cold water upon all her attempts to get into the temples. It was a great disappointment to Miss Seton. She had come out to India primarily for her health's sake, but secondly for amusement. Her health was completely restored, and now she craved for sight-seeing. She had got used to the want of clothing on the part of the people, and had begun to regard the brown skin as clothing in itself. Her curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and she swallowed with avidity every detail she could garner of the natives' social and religious customs, however unsavoury they might be. It seemed to her a kind of duty to gain all the knowledge she could of the evil ways of humanity, although she could not alter them, or improve them one whit by the acquirement of the knowledge. She would have pried and poked about the slums of London in just the same spirit; attracted by a morbid curiosity, and impressed with a vague idea that it was her duty to humanity to learn how it lived, how it worshipped, and how it sinned.

As she listened to the two gentlemen's plans for the morrow, she determined that she too would be present. The presence of the troops would make her visit free from all danger. She would go off by herself with her own hired gharry, and see what there was to be seen. She could return as quickly as she went, and Mrs Stainer need never know where she had been.

With this little plan in her head, she went to bed, telling the ayah to bring tea in good time, and to order the gharry early.

At daybreak the pilgrims who had camped outside the temple began to pour through the great gateway in a steady stream. The stalls of the saffron sellers, the image merchants, and of the other dealers, were thronged by intending worshippers. Numbers of prosperous-looking men idled about, warming themselves in the beams of the rising sun. They were girded about the loins with clean white muslin; over their shoulders they had flung muslin cloths; these would presently be removed, and they would be left bare to the waist, with the Brahminical cord crossing the brawny chest exposed. Foreheads and bosoms were alike disfigured by the swami marks denoting the sect to which each belonged. Their heads were bare, being freshly shaven in accordance with religious rule, and none

wore turban or cap. The majority of them were fat, sensual-looking men, whose dull heavy stare betokened indulgence in the alluring poppyseed curry and dreamy bhang. All chewed betel nut, the red juice of which was plentifully expelled from the thick lips, leaving the ivory teeth stained a dull red.

Numbers of women moved about amongst the men. Many of them carried young children, naked except for the jewels with which each was loaded. Girls and boys ran in and out amongst friends and strangers, laughing, playing, shrieking, and adding to the general babel of sound. The dust flew in clouds, and helped to poison the fresh morning air, which was already tainted with reeking humanity.

The ministrants of the temple were busy at one of the shrines. The image was removed from its pedestal; its uncouth limbs were incased in plates of gold, which gave them the appearance of being formed entirely of the precious metal. Its shapeless body was draped in richly-embroidered materials. Its head was surmounted with a magnificent fez-like covering, studded with gems. Jewels hung from its neck, ears, nose, and wrists, and the adorning was complete. The half-naked Brahmins who dressed the huge doll stood on small ceremony with their swami; reverence did not form any part of their ritual.

Whilst the image was thus being prepared, "the wives of the gods" were also busy. Round-limbed, soft-eyed nautch girls adorned their glossy black tresses with the starry blossoms of the jasmine flower, and clasped the gleaming pearl and emerald upon ankle, neck, and wrist. The yellow saffron was delicately rubbed into the olive skin, giving golden lights and shades to the brown complexion. The liquid lovelit eyes were touched with the darkening brush, and the lips were stained an enticing red. Semi-transparent clothes of the finest texture were wound round the supple bodies, half veiling what would be less tempting if wholly seen. Nothing was left undone to make the "wives and daughters of the gods" attractive and entrancing.

In the great elephant stables, the big patient beasts were still standing, tethered to their stone pillars, and quietly munching the rank fodder at their feet. As they ate the grass and sweet bamboo, their mahouts put the finishing touches to the gaudy emblems of Vishnu that covered their ears and foreheads. In vivid green, red, and gold, the trident of the deity shone in gorgeous colour, ready for the pageant of the day. Other attendants threw the embroidered trappings over the animals' unsightly leathery flanks, and hung the brazen bells from their shoulders. Beneath was hidden the stout

harness and chains by which the strong beasts would draw the heavy car containing the idol.

The silver throne, fresh from the hands of the Brahmin burnisher, was fixed upon the car in the early morning sunlight. The idol, adorned with gold and jewels, was placed upon its throne. A message was sent to the mahouts and the nautch girls to hold themselves in readiness. The musicians, with their weird instruments of music and droning tom-toms, were waiting by the car. Rutnam had determined that there should be no delay, that Zelma should have no time to think until she was safely secured within the door which should for ever shut her off from her father's world, and secure her wealth to the temple.

The sun was already above the horizon when Zelma awoke from the deep sleep induced by grief. She dressed, ate a few mouthfuls of toast, and swallowed her cup of coffee. Full of fervour and hope she left her room, and crept through the quiet house. As she passed her father's door, she stopped to ask the nurse the oft-repeated question, only to hear the same answer, "Just as usual, no change." The doctor was expected soon, but Zelma would not wait. She went out through the back verandah, where her mother's carriage awaited them both, and, without a moment's hesitation, got in.

Mrs Anderson and Rutnam's mother were

both there, the latter carefully holding the precious little packet of jewels, unobserved by mother and daughter, under the folds of her saree.

During the drive Zelma seemed in a dream. She was conscious of one great idea which absorbed every other thought, and drowned reason in fervid expectation. She was going to intercede with God for her father. God would surely hear her at last, and when she returned home she would be met with the joyful news that the long-deferred rally had taken place, and that health was fast returning. As he had been taken ill so suddenly, it did not seem improbable that his health should be restored as suddenly. It never entered her head to consider what kind of service she was going to take part in. She only knew that she was going to pray, heart and soul, for her father, through a medium which Rutnam would provide, and which would serve for her mother as well as herself.

Hitherto she had been carefully guarded from all exhibitions of idolatry. Her only notions of it were founded upon what the Brahmin had told her. She therefore could not possibly picture the ritual which would be provided by the ministrants of the temple, nor imagine for a moment the ceremonies she would be called upon to witness.

The carriage rolled swiftly along till it reached the Island. There it went more slowly, as the roads were full of pilgrims, who were moving in one continuous stream towards the temple. The crowds got denser and denser, until it seemed to Zelma as if they were passing between a living wall on either side. The carriage drove through the big gateway, and threaded its way along the street to the archway of the second enclosure, where it stopped. Some temple peons, who were stationed there to receive the visitors, thrust back the people with small ceremony. The carriage door was opened, and Zelma and her companions got out.

The police station was within the first great gateway. It was a well-built house, standing a little forward in the row of buildings that formed one side of the street. It was furnished with mats, chairs, tables, and punkahs. Here Colonel Mayhew and Percy Bell were seated, taking a light breakfast of tea and toast after their morning ride. As the carriage passed down the street, Percy caught sight of it.

"Surely that must be Mrs Anderson's carriage," he exclaimed in surprise, jumping up from his seat and going to the window. "Yes, I recognise the black and yellow livery of the coachman. What can she be doing here at such a time?"

"She is probably going to take part in the feast. I suppose an English husband is of small account compared with her native gods," said Colonel Mayhew contemptuously.

Almost immediately afterwards another carriage drove up ; but for want of two such unscrupulous horse-keepers as cleared the way for Mrs Anderson, the more 'modest equipage came to a standstill just in front of the police station. The door of the carriage was opened by the occupant, and, to Percy's amazement and annoyance, out jumped Miss Seton. No sooner had she landed amongst the crowd, than the driver turned his gharry and drove off, to tie up his horse and join the throng. Miss Seton was left unprotected in the centre of an unsavoury, unmannerly crowd.

Percy seized his hat, and rushed towards her.

"Miss Seton ! What are you doing here at such a time ? This is no place for you. You had better go back."

"Oh ! Mr Bell, is that you ?" replied the lady, assuming a tone of surprise. "I have come to be a spectator for a short time this morning. I promise you I will do nothing rash. I was driving out in this direction, and thought I would look in for a few minutes. Do let me stay. Indeed, I must stay now, for my carriage is gone !"

Miss Seton laughed in childish delight. Percy was too much of a gentleman to express all he felt, but he mentally consigned the troublesome female to Jericho. He said,—

“I beg you will remain with me, then, for it is really unsafe for you to go alone amongst this excited rabble. You may be robbed and insulted.”

“I have nothing on me worth stealing. Now, Mr Bell, do let me go alone where I like. I am very different from what I was when I landed, and am not the least afraid of these people. They are as harmless as children.”

But Percy insisted on her remaining with them for the present; much against her will, he drew her within the house, where he posted her at the window looking down the street. Miss Seton made the best of it, but determined to escape as soon as she could find an opportunity.

“Has Bevan arrived with the troops?” asked Percy presently of Colonel Mayhew.

“Yes; my men tell me that they are posted just within the great gate. They have been brought in in small detachments, so that the people should not be alarmed at their numbers.”

“What had we better do?” asked Percy.

"Just remain here quietly," replied his companion, who had been stationed in Trichinopoly some time, and knew more of these religious quarrels than his companion. "I can trust my inspectors to give me ample notice if our presence is required; meanwhile, we are best here. It will only irritate the Hindus to see us watching them."

"May I smoke, Miss Seton?" said Percy.

"Oh, certainly," she replied, without turning her face from the fascinating scenes in the street.

The three relapsed into silence. The noise of the crowd increased; a European inspector came into the verandah, and Colonel Mayhew engaged him in earnest conversation. Percy joined, and the three men stood in the verandah where Miss Seton could not overhear their conversation. Seizing the opportunity, she slipped out of a side door, and was quickly lost in the crowd.

"Confound the woman!" muttered Percy, discovering her absence about five minutes later. There was nothing to be done. He had no intention of following her. If she got herself into trouble, she must get out of it as best she could. He could only hope that she would refrain from irritating any worshipper by her

overweening curiosity, but if she were roughly spoken to she must take the consequences. • He had done all he could to protect her.

CHAPTER VII.

A RESCUE.

“ Seek
Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruit and cakes,
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought;
Each man his prison makes.”—EDWIN ARNOLD.

MRS ANDERSON and her daughter stepped from their carriage, closely followed by the old aunt. The peons, carrying out instructions previously given, forced a pathway through the crowd, and conducted them to a small raised house or chuttram. The chuttram was partly open to the street, but the back of it was built up into a small room. Already Zelma's mind misgave her as to the wisdom of having come into such scenes. It was all so totally different from what she expected. The crowds of noisy, chattering people, the choking dust, the clang

of gongs, the wail of the horns, the droning of the tom-toms, bewildered and confused her. • She turned to her mother and said,—

“What does all this noise mean, mother? What is going on? Why do we not go into the temple to the service?”

“It is all right, my child,” replied her mother. “The people always make a noise during the feasts. We are not going into the temple just yet, but must wait here. The procession must pass, and we shall follow the great swami to the shrine. Hark! now I hear it coming!”

• Above the buzz and din of the crowd arose a strain of wild tuneless music in the distance, accompanied by a ceaseless tom-toming. As the sound fell on the ear of the assemblage, the murmur of the people rose to a roar of mad excitement.

Zelma shuddered. There was something irreverent in this clamour of the human tongue. It accorded ill with her sorrowing, prayerful mood. The door of the little room opened, and a Brahmin, naked to the waist, entered. His head was shaven, and his body was disfigured with as many as eighteen swami marks. His breast was smeared with sacred ashes, and round his neck hung a garland of sacred beads called *rudra aksha*—Siva’s eyes. The girl did

not recognise Rutnam, and turned haughtily away, offended at his presence.

"Do not be alarmed or shocked, Miss Anderson," said the Brahmin, in his suave tones. He had been quick to note her involuntary movement of repulsion. "You do not recognise me in my temple dress. I am obliged to appear thus at all festivals, if I wish to take part in them."

But though he spoke softly, there was no apology in his voice. On the contrary, a new tone of triumph marked his speech, which he took no trouble to conceal. She turned and looked at him; he could not but read the expression of disgust upon her face, which had settled there, as her mind grasped the details of his heathenish appearance. It angered him to be thus scrutinised with growing contempt on her part, and he became brusque and rude.

"You evidently do not think so much of me in my native dress as in European clothes," he said, with a new-born familiarity.

"I do not," replied Zelma shortly.

"And yet it is chiefly on your account, my sister, that I am thus dressed."

She turned from him, her beautiful eyes suffused with tears of disappointment and anger. She thought that she would have been conducted reverently into one of

the great halls of the temple; and that there, in the still, sacred place, the Brahmins vested in long robes, such as the Jewish Cohens might have worn, would have offered up prayer and incense to God, in all the simplicity of their faith.

Here she was, penned up in an ill-smelling, darkened room, foul with neglect, whilst Rutnam was venturing to appear before her in a costume which was neither respectful to herself, nor to the presence of the Great Spirit whose assistance he had undertaken to invoke.

Whilst she was thus uneasily beginning to compare the ideal with the terrible reality before her, she felt her mother's soft fingers about her neck.

"What is it, mother? my jewels! How did you come by them?"

Mrs Anderson ignored the question of possession, and said,—

"You must wear them, Ahmonee, in the presence of the great swami. And you must promise to give them to the swami, if your prayers are answered."

"Give these precious gift of my father's?" she exclaimed. "You are mad, mother. I will wear them if you like, but I will never consent to part with them."

"Well! well! my child; wear them," said her mother soothingly. "The swami will perhaps be pleased with that alone."

Not knowing how to resist without violence, and always willing to please her mother, Zelma, in her sweetness, let her clasp the precious stones round her neck and arms, and fasten diamond stars upon her hair. As she did it, Zelma tried in vain to conceal the sparkling gems in the lace trimming of her dress, and so hide them from the vulgar gaze of the crowd. To be adorned thus, at such a moment, was another outrage upon her wounded feelings.

The increasing noise outside told that the procession was approaching. Suddenly the door of the room was thrown open, and her mother, taking her by the arm, hurried her forth into the blazing morning sunlight. Rutnam stood on small ceremony with her; he no longer endeavoured to mask his feelings in soft, gentle speech; the European veneer had disappeared with the European garments.

Zelma held back for a moment, but at a sign from Rutnam her other arm was seized and she was forced along, whether she willed it or not. At the top of the steps they paused, and she had time to glance down the street.

A glittering image seated upon a throne of silver, and carried upon a lofty Jugger-nath car, was slowly approaching. The hideous face and limbs were apparently made of burnished gold. The expression of

its features was stony, and a smile of self-satisfaction and inanity seemed set upon its lips. Three elephants were tethered to the car in single file. They were well-trained to their work, drawing the car a few steps, and then stopping to let the assembled multitude gaze upon the image. Whilst the huge animals stayed their steps, they lifted their trunks at a signal from their drivers, and trumpeted, increasing the hideous din.

The musicians and nautch girls accompanied the car; when it ceased moving they began to dance round it with slow measured tread, and to pose before the figure enthroned above. They sang their so-called hymns, cast passionate glances at the image, made gestures of love, and seemed as though they would embrace the god. Every movement of their rounded limbs, every word they uttered, was calculated to arouse the worst passions in the human breast. The crowd gazed with delight and rapture on the heathen pageant, and uttered cries of "Govinda! Govinda!" in ecstasy.

The car slowly passed the place where Zelma stood. Mrs Anderson again seized the arm of the now thoroughly horrified girl, and forced her into the throng. She gave one appealing glance at her mother, but saw no protection or escape. Perfectly powerless, she was carried along unresist-

ingly, through the way made for the well-known Brahmin in the crowd, till the car was reached.

The procession moved on till it came to the great gateway of the moolasthanum, before which there was a large open space. It was not usual to perform any ritual whilst the image was in procession, but this was a special occasion. Rutnam, thinking it would impress Zelma and her mother, had arranged that the idol should be anointed with oil at this spot. It would moreover please the great crowd of worshippers, especially that portion which did not possess the privilege of passing through the mysterious door.

A brass pan of fire was brought by two half-clad Brahmins. A pot of melted oil rested upon it. Some camphor and incense were thrown upon the live charcoal, and a pale blue smoke ascended. The nautch girls danced with renewed vigour; the tom-toms beat on all sides of them; the elephants trumpeted again and again, and the people yelled in the mad excitement of unbridled fanaticism.

Zelma, who was becoming paralysed with horror, roused herself by a great effort. Clutching Rutnam's arm, she cried out, uttering his name sharply,—

“Rutnam! Rutnam! What does all this madness mean? Take me away; this is not

what I came to see, this is not what you promised !”

But the gaze that met hers in answer to her entreaty was a gaze of triumphant enthusiasm, of ecstasy, of fanatical success. It appalled her, and made her realise that she had placed herself in the power of a man who was temporarily mad. She turned to her mother.

“Oh ! mother ! take me home ! take me home !” she entreated.

But the same wild light shone in her mother’s eye.

“Wait !” cried the woman ; “the offering is about to be made.”

•The officiating Brahmins stepped upon the car. The fire was raised upon the uplifted hands of some who stood below. The warm oil was ladled out in a brass spoon, and a few drops sprinkled in the golden face of the image. The rest was thrown about the car and amongst the crowd.

The people crushed forward to receive the purifying ceremonial ghee, and were with difficulty prevented from pressing upon Mrs Anderson and her daughter. Here a sickly old man caught the precious drops, and rubbed them eagerly upon his weak limbs ; there a mother smeared the lips and forehead of her child, hoping thus to propitiate the swami, and cause it to smile upon her delicate baby, that was not

strong and healthy like the rest of her black brood.

When the oil was nearly exhausted, one of the Brahmins seized the jar, and, raising it above the idol, poured the remainder over it. The action was viewed with rapt attention by the crowd. At a signal from the man who held the jar, the people near the car raised their folded hands to their foreheads, crying "Govinda! Govinda!" and then fell to the ground, grovelling in the dust.

It was a supreme moment of superstitious awe, and a sudden silence fell upon the vast concourse. Mrs Anderson and Rutnam also bent the knee before the golden image.

Zelma, to whom all this was strangely horrible, was left standing a conspicuous figure by the car. When the people round her dropped down, a sense of freedom came over her; her prison walls were gone. Taking her eyes from the oil-besmirched face of the swami, she glanced from side to side with a newborn hope of escape, like some terrified animal that sees the gate open and dares not fly.

One other person was also left standing like herself, gazing from side to side, but with a very different expression.

Miss Seton, having eluded Percy's vigilance, had followed the crowd; and by dint

of pushing and struggling had obtained a position near the car. There was a great sea of human bodies lying between her and Zelma, but across the breathing flesh their glances met. She found Miss Seton's eyes fixed upon her in open-mouthed wonder. She threw up her hands and cried for help. The next instant the crowd arose, and she was once more engulfed in the human walls of her prison. But Miss Seton had seen enough. The look on the girl's face was sufficient to tell her that something was wrong; and there was no mistaking the signal which she made for succour.

•The roar of the crowd began again, and with vehement cries they called for the burning of more camphor and incense. The Brahmins were ready, and the ritual was continued.

Miss Seton did not wait to see anything else. She pushed and elbowed her way back to the clearer parts of the street, and then she ran, as perhaps she had never run before. She made her way straight into the police station, where Percy and Colonel Mayhew were still waiting.

"Oh! Mr Bell! They have got Zelma Anderson down there with the idol. She is all by herself, and seems terrified."

Miss Seton had not, of course, recognised the mother.

Percy bounded up from his chair.

"Zelma Anderson there! You must be mistaken!"

"Indeed I am not. Do come quickly, or she will die of fright," said Miss Seton.

"We saw her carriage go by, Bell," said Colonel Mayhew, who had thrown aside his cheroot and was buckling on his sword.

"Good Heavens! This is some madness of the mother's," exclaimed Percy. "There is mischief brewing." His quick brain jumped rapidly to conclusions. "This is what your men meant when they said something unusual was to happen. Most probably the Brahmins have drugged the girl."

This was hastily said, as the two men caught up their helmets, and hurried out of the room.

"Wait, Bell; it won't do to rush into this affair without a moment's thought. We shall want all the police and the troops, I fancy; for this means rescue, and taking Miss Anderson forcibly from her mother's guardianship."

Percy paused; Colonel Mayhew continued,—

"I will call my inspectors and a body of constables, whilst you had better go to Bevan, and bring him and the troops with you."

Miss Seton, who had been an eager listener, broke in here.

"Let me go to Captain Bevan. Mr Bell ought to go to Zelma at once, or I am sure she will faint from fright."

Percy turned to Miss Seton.

"Do you think you can find Captain Bevan?"

"Of course I can; I know exactly where he is," and off the intrepid little woman started, delighted to be of some use after all.

"Stop a moment," cried Colonel Mayhew. "Tell Bevan to bring his men quietly down to the large caste entrance. He knows which it is. I know the car and the idol will pass that way, and it is there that we must get hold of Miss Anderson. If she is once drawn inside a Brahmin house, under cover of her mother's caste, Heaven only knows when we shall get her out again."

Percy went rapidly down the street towards the place from whence the noise of the tom-toms proceeded. Colonel Mayhew stayed behind to assemble his men. When they were ready, he marched them down in single file by the same road the collector had taken.

It was no easy matter to penetrate the crowd. The ceremony was over, and the

car was once more in motion. Slowly and surely the procession approached the great door. The crowd was already beginning to separate in confusion and excitement, for none but the higher castes would venture to pass through the door. Percy had therefore to contend with two streams of humanity. The police were vigorous and unsparing in their efforts to open a way for him; he soon left them far behind in his eagerness, for the precious moments were passing all too quickly. Still he was divided from her who was in imminent peril of being lost to him, perhaps for ever. The thought of it made him frantic. He could see the great car with its golden burden in front of him. It stopped, and he knew that the procession was preparing to pass through the door. Another great cry of "Govinda!" arose from the people as the equipage began to move again. The elephants, trumpeting as they went, passed in single file under the tall gopuram that surmounted the doorway, then the car slowly disappeared. It had to be moved with great care, as there was only just room for it.

Percy struggled on, leaping over obstructing bodies, pushing, fighting, striking right and left, as though Death itself were at his heels. Half-blinded by dust, he had nearly gained the doorway when he heard a pierc-

ing shriek. With a frantic effort he burst through the thin, human wall which separated him from Zelma.

The car had disappeared into the sacred precincts of the moolasthanum, and a stream of Brahmins was pouring through the open door after it. Zelma, dragged violently by the arm, was being hurried along towards the door of a private house on the opposite side. As she reached the doorway, she made a sudden movement, and endeavoured to wrench herself away from her captors. She diverted them from their course, and succeeded in getting within reach of the doorpost; against this she planted a foot and hand, and prevented herself from being dragged any further.

At that moment Percy reached her side, and, seizing her other arm, held her firmly, though to do so was almost to dislocate the limb. A spasm of pain passed over her face, but, turning her eyes upon him with an imploring glance, she cried,—

“Oh! save me! Percy, save me!”

Mrs Anderson angrily pulled her towards the open door. Zelma cried out from the pain. Her cry, in the presence of the collector, warned the woman that she must desist, or she would find herself in the hands of the police. Violence was all very well when none but fanatics were there to

witness it; but in the presence of the powerful representative of the British Raj, it was dangerous. She therefore relaxed her grasp slightly without leaving go her hold, and, turning viciously upon Percy, she cursed him by all her gods.

"She belongs to us! she is my daughter! She is Brahmin by birth, and she comes to us willingly and voluntarily!" she cried furiously.

"You lie," replied Percy, in ringing tones. "She is Christian by birth! She belongs to her father and to us."

With these words he passed his arm round her waist; for Zelma, still standing with her foot set against the doorpost, was beginning to tremble.

"She is ours!" shouted Rutnam. "She has never been baptised into the accursed religion of the usurpers of our country."

All this time the crowd had been surging in a state of excitement and gathering wrath. Rutnam was in his way a great power in Srirungam. The collector would find it very difficult to hold his own against such a crowd if he chose to appeal to them for assistance. Percy was well aware of this, and he cast a rapid and anxious glance in the direction of Colonel Mayhew and his men. It was impossible to keep off the excited Hindus. The great attraction

of the car was gone ; the way through the door was stopped, and none of the worshippers knew what it all meant. They were beginning to lose their temper at being thus prevented from following the idol, and they could also perceive that, from some cause or other, Rutnam was beside himself with rage. Each moment that passed increased the danger of the situation. If he could only free Zelma from the grip of the mother's fingers, they might be able to retreat.

How he longed for Captain Bevan and the troops ! Was he right to have trusted Miss Seton to find him and direct him ? It would be fatal to show fear at such a moment, or to allow Rutnam's tongue to run on before the crowd.

Holding Zelma tightly to him, Percy looked Rutnam steadily in the face, and said, in a low, quiet voice,—

“If you do not let Miss Anderson go, I will place my foot over the threshold of your temple, and desecrate it.”

It was a bold threat, and one full of import to the Brahmin. To desecrate the temple would be to deprive it of health and prestige. The divine or “mantric” essence, which was supposed to dwell in the moolasthanum, would depart ; there would no longer be any virtue in the idol ; and, until the precious essence could be restored

by certain ceremonies, no pilgrims would visit the shrine, or deposit their offerings at the feet of the swami.

Rutnam knew what it meant. He also knew that the collector had a will of iron, and that, even if it involved his own death, he would carry out his threat, having once made it. With these thoughts in his mind, the Brahmin signed to Mrs Anderson to relax her hold on Zelma's arm; and the girl, freed at last, fell back a pace or two from the open door. The whole scene had occupied but a few minutes, during which time Mrs Anderson had shown increasing excitement. On the release of her daughter she retreated towards the door of the moolasthanum.

"Call your daughter," said Rutnam. "She refuses to follow us. If she does not complete the ceremonies we have begun, the swami will bring great evil upon you. Secure your daughter to us, and you will indeed be blessed."

The woman turned a look of religious fervour upon him. It was again as though the god himself spoke to her from Rutnam's lips.

She stepped into the doorway, keeping the sacred threshold between them, and called to Zelma to come to her.

She heard the cry and looked towards her mother. Mrs Anderson's silk cloth

was splashed with the ceremonial oil, her face was smeared with the sacred ashes and pigment; her eyes burned with the same fanatical madness that shone from Rutnam's. She stood before her daughter the very embodiment of idolatrous superstition and heathenism.

With a shudder Zelma turned from her and clung to Percy. The mother noted the action, and raising her hand she cried,—

“Ah-monee! if you will not come to me, I will cast you off, and you shall be no daughter of mine.”

Her tones rang louder with each word; and as she spoke a malicious smile overcast Rutnam's face.

“Go back to your dead father, and live an outcast,” screamed the infatuated woman. “You are neither Krishna's nor Christ's. I cheated you out of the rite that would have made you a Christian. When your father told me to take you to the Font, I substituted another babe for you, hoping one day to take you into the fold of my own people. Now I cast you off. Go! You have neither parents, nor religion, nor nation. You are an outcast, an accursed •outcast.”

✓ She shrieked the words at the shrinking girl in her increasing fury; and then began to vilify the dying man, her husband. She

cursed him, and his nation, and his ancestors; she cursed his daughter, and the man who stood by Zelma's side, in a paroxysm of fanatical wrath. Passion mastered her, religious fervour swamped every other feeling, and she became a transformed creature whom Zelma scarcely recognised.

As she ceased speaking, a welcome sound of booted feet fell upon Percy's ears. The sepoys were approaching. Captain Bevan pushed his way with greater ease through the crowd than the less formidable police. The natives shrank before the fixed bayonets of the sepoys, and gave the gleaming steel ample room to pass.

Rutnam saw that the game was up. Failure, wretched failure, had attended his efforts. The girl had been rescued; even the jewels which he so ardently coveted for his swami had slipped through his fingers. There remained only the mother. She should not escape, he would take good care of that. He stepped back through the doorway, pushing the furious mother, who had now lost all control of herself, before him, and he gave the signal to those within to close the door.

It was a big, heavy double door. As it slowly swung to in their faces, Zelma and Percy looked their last upon the Brahmin woman.

The key turned in the lock, a silence fell on the crowd and the angry murmurs subsided. There was no fear of further excitement or danger; and the mere presence of the troops was sufficient to keep the people quiescent. The police were able to establish order without any further difficulty.

The road was cleared, and Zelma moved silently by Percy's side towards the police station. She was not in the habit of fainting; though very much exhausted by all she had gone through, she was able to walk unassisted, and refused the offer of an arm. When she reached the house she sank into an armchair, leaned back without a word, apparently wrapped in thought, and remained there till Percy came to tell her that the carriage was ready.

Not a syllable escaped the civilian's lips. Not a question was asked as to the reason of her presence there. Not a word of reproach was uttered. His manner showed nothing but gentle, heartfelt pity; the protective way in which he seemed to have taken possession of her was inexpressibly soothing. She longed in a childlike manner to cling round his neck, and weep out her sorrow, her bitter failure, her shameful folly in his arms. She was alone; her father was dying, perhaps dead. Her mother had

cast her off and forsaken her at a time when she most needed a parent's loving care; and the dreadful words, "You are neither Krishna's nor Christ's," rang in her ears.

She took no notice of Miss Seton, who, excited and elate at having helped to rescue her, chattered volubly.

Colonel Mayhew and Captain Bevan were still occupied in the streets, where it was likely they would remain until quite sure of no further disturbance.

In five minutes Mrs Anderson's carriage drove up, followed by Percy's horse. He handed Zelma into the carriage; and, closing the door, told the coachman to drive home quickly. Then, mounting his own horse, he followed the carriage, and saw it safely out of the Island across the bridge and through the town. For even now he did not trust the Brahmin; he feared lest an attempt might be made to induce the girl to join her mother again.

His fears were groundless. Rutnam had accepted his failure as inevitable. He was doing all in his power to keep up Mrs Anderson's excitement and wrath. He wanted at all hazards to prevent a desire on her part to return home. If he could not secure the larger prize in the person of the daughter, he could still keep the mother; her jointure would be a portion

well worth gaining for the coffers of the temple.

Percy rode slowly back to Srirungam, his heart aching for the sorrow-stricken girl. He already guessed that Mrs Anderson had worked upon her feelings, and decoyed her to the temple on the impulse of the moment. He knew Zelma well enough to be sure that she would sit in severe judgment on her own folly ; and that her remorse and regret would be overpowering. As he thought of this, and the coming trial by the death-bed, when the daughter must say farewell for ever in this world to the dearly-loved father, he feared lest that passionate heart should break under the burden of its grief and bitter self-reproach.

Miss Seton met him on arrival at the police station.

"It is all over, Mr Bell. There is nothing more to see. I hear that the idol will not be brought out again ; and so perhaps I had better go home."

He found her carriage for her. The driver was also satisfied that there was no more sight-seeing to be done ; he soon had his shabby old gharry ready. As Percy closed the door, he said a few words of thanks to Miss Seton ; and asked her, in friendship to Zelma, to say nothing of her presence at the feast.

A few hours later the sepoy's were marched back to their lines, and the three gentlemen, thoroughly fatigued with the heat, and anxiety of the morning's work, gladly turned their backs on the temple with its idols and pageantry.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMOUSE.

"Pale death with impartial step, knocks at the hut of the poor and the palaces of kings."—HORACE.

ZELMA arrived home before mid-day. The house was very silent as she entered it. She did not stop at her father's door to make the usual inquiry. Somehow her heart failed her. The impulsive, impatient hope, which had hitherto buoyed her up, was dead. She was conscious only of weakness; of criminal weakness. She had made herself ridiculous in the eyes of the chaplain, and despicable in the eyes of Percy. For the first time since trouble had overtaken her, she felt that she was weak and unable to stand alone. She needed friends, she longed for a stronger intellect than her own; she wanted a better balanced mind to support and guide her aright.

It would have been a relief if some one could have scolded her for her folly; if only she could have gone to the dear father, and

told him what she had done. His even temper and rational judgment would have brought the chaos of her mind into some order. Anything would have been easier to bear than the terrible self-accusation with which she now scourged herself. In the abandonment of her grief and shame, she could only throw herself upon her sofa in a flood of tears, or walk restlessly, to and fro in the pretty room, which his love had made so perfect for her.

Breakfast was laid upon the table, where it had long been waiting. The old servant stood, watchful and patient, till he should find an opportunity of persuading his mistress to eat. She had had nothing since the early morning. After a very severe fit of weeping, in which every moan and sob wrung the old man heart, he went in search of Abdool the peon. In Zelma's childhood, the peon had often ministered to her infantile wants. Many a glass of water had she taken from his hand; many a biscuit had she eaten at his bidding.

Carrying a glass of wine and some dry toast, old Abdool crept to the side of the exhausted girl.

"Drink, little Missie. •Please eat and drink. Master wishing Missie to eat."

The words were spoken in broken accents of inexpressible pity. Simple as they were,

they fell like balm on Zelma's breaking heart. She looked up; and, following the instincts of childhood in her weakness, she did as he bade her. She ate a few mouthfuls of toast and swallowed the wine. In a short time she felt better, and began to gain some command over her grief. The ayah prepared her bath, and induced her to bathe and change her travel-stained dress.

Thus refreshed and strengthened, she was better able to face the trouble of the day. But though her head was growing clearer with rest and food, she was still confused and bewildered over the events of the morning. Every now and then a great wave of shame and remorse swept back again, overwhelming her with passionate regret, and bringing the hot blood again and again to her cheeks.

Oh, why had she gone? In what mad fit of impulse had she listened to the specious arguments of Rutnam? How was it possible that he could have persuaded her to take part in those orgies? The memory of the struggle at the door made her shudder. She could hear the irreverent babel of voices, above which rose the noise of tom-tom and the shrill songs of the temple-girls. She could see Rutnam's fanatical face, lighted up with triumphant religious fervour, and lastly, her mother, with her oil-stained gar-

ments and swami-marked face. She heard again the curses that fell from those lips in the insanity of the moment, when all love for the living daughter and dying husband was killed by fanaticism.

And this hideous travesty of worship was addressed to the living God! How could she have supposed for a moment that it could have pleased Him? She had fathomed the awful fact that Hinduism of the present day, as it is practised amongst the masses, has nothing in common with the pure philosophy of its sacred books.

It seemed impossible that the refined and beautiful sentiment uttered by Rutnam, when he propounded his religion to her, could belong to the same religious system whose ritual she had just witnessed. His speech was golden, his religious sentiments elevating, but in his practice there was not a single redeeming feature.

He had professed to believe in the All Father as a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable; a Spirit full of wisdom, holiness, and goodness, Whom it was man's chief end to glorify. Yet he presumed to worship this Spirit in the likeness of a golden image, clothed in jewels and rich apparel, to which nautch-girls addressed their love-songs. The swami was invested with brute passions, and his worshippers were taught that they could best please

him by imitating his own lawless indulgence of the appetites.

Such a worship, performed with the knowledge of better things, was a gross insult to God, and a bitter, blasphemous mockery:

Yet she had consented not only to witness this blasphemy, but to take part in it, to identify herself with the worshippers, and to approach the pure, sentient, omniscient Father through this corrupt channel. Feelings of anger, shame, and self-reproach occupied her heart in turn. It was hard to forgive Rutnam. It was much harder still to forgive her mother who had led her; but it was hardest of all to forgive herself.

The thought of forgiveness fired another train in that passionate, remorseful heart. If she found it so hard to pardon herself and others, what must it be with the great God, whom she had so mocked and insulted? Could He forgive her sin? She fell on her knees by the bed, and prayed as she had never prayed before. The dying father was forgotten in the new agony and the self-abasement. What did life and death matter compared with the death of her own soul? Her father was passing away to a happier state. In his gentle life he had never offended his God as she had done. As she had told Mr Brown, it was not his soul that

was sick, but his body. But with her the soul was sick unto death.

"O God! forgive me! pardon me! have mercy upon me!" cried this poor child in the loneliness of her room. "Be merciful to me, a sinner," she repeated again and again, in heart-broken accents. "I have sinned; Lord, forgive me, for Jesus Christ's sake, for Christ's sake."

The repetition of this name brought back her mother's words,—

"You are neither Krishna's nor Christ's."

"For Christ's sake." What right had she to call upon Christ? She did not belong to Him. The great Brother of mankind had never received her within His fold. The thought was paralysing. She rose from her knees like one who had received a stunning blow; she threw herself upon her bed, where she remained motionless, prayerless, hopeless. She was cast, poor child, into a veritable valley of the shadow of death.

How long she had lain thus she did not know. She was roused by Mrs Stainer.

"Come down to your father, my dear. There seems to be a change, and we do not think he can last much longer."

The words were spoken very gently and very slowly, so that she might not be startled. Zelma heard them in a strange, dreamlike way, and got up from her bed. Her face was waxen in its whiteness, and

the beautiful eyes were full of a great dumb, despairing sorrow. Tears came into Mrs Stainer's own eyes as she caught sight of the infinitely sad, hopeless look on the fair face.

She walked down the stairs to her father's room without a word, and went straight to his bedside. There were several people there. Two doctors stood near the head of the bed, with Percy and Mr Stainer. Mr Brown was kneeling by the side of the dying man. As she came into the room, Percy started forward to meet her, but she, did not seem to see him. Her eyes were fixed upon her father.

Percy and the doctors fell back as Zelma dropped on her knees, but Mrs Stainer went to her. Passing her arm round her, she endeavoured by silent sympathy to help her under the blow which was falling.

The end was near. Anderson's breath came in gasps, and the strong heart fluttered in a feeble pulsation. His lips moved constantly, but the words he said were inaudible. Zelma gazed into the dear face. Alas! the eyes did not recognise her. She laid her hand on the restless, twitching fingers, now cold with approaching death, but he did not seem conscious of her touch.

Mr Brown, occasionally silent and occasionally praying, began a commendatory prayer in a slow, earnest voice. Although

the sense of it did not penetrate the ears of the dying man, nor even entirely reach the brain of the grieving daughter, it was like the rustle of an angel's wing in the room, and brought comfort to all. Mr Brown, no longer bewildered by the impetuosity and unreasonableness of a distracted mourner, could minister to grief in his own gentle way. He glanced at the girl by his side, and was touched to the heart by her stricken look.

Perhaps it was this which suggested his words, for he began that hymn which rarely fails to reach all those who have suffered :—

“When wounded sore the stricken heart,
Lies bleeding and unbound,
One only Hand, a pierced Hand,
Can salve the sinner's wound.

When sorrow swells the laden breast,
And tears of anguish flow,
One only Heart, a broken Heart,
Can feel the sinner's woe.

'Tis Jesus' blood that washes white,
His Hand that brings relief,
His Heart is touched with all our joys,
And feels for all our grief.”

Zelma listened ; the words fell on her stricken heart, and slowly sank into it. She turned her head, and laid it upon Mrs Stainer's breast. The kind-hearted woman, weeping for another's grief, felt her shiver, and drew her close.

In the silence that followed, Anderson's lips again moved, and his eyes opened. The doctors, who were prepared for the last flicker of strength and possible consciousness, signed to Mrs Stainer to raise Zelma.

"Your father is speaking," she said.

She got up and leaned over him, bending her ear to catch what he said. The words, so continually reiterated, were nothing more nor less than the form of prayer which Anderson used daily, asking God to be good to his dear daughter. In spite of the clouded senses, the one idea that pervaded his brain was his child and her welfare ; it found expression in the oft-repeated prayer which was familiar with constant use.

She pressed her lips passionately upon his brow. At the touch, the sick man suddenly opened his eyes, and gazed at her for a few short seconds. It was as though the soul had awakened at last from its torpidity, and was gathering itself together for its long flight.

"Father, dear father!" cried, Zelma, in passionate appeal.

The eyes closed, and with a few gasps the spirit fled.

- A great silence fell over the room after the laboured breathing ceased. The punkah still swung over the bed, though the dead man could no longer feel its cool air, and

the gentle rustle of its moving frill was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Presently a move was made by the doctors; they signed to Mrs Stainer to take the girl away. Zelma passively allowed herself to be led back to her room, whither Percy followed. The sight of her grief unnerved him, and he scarcely knew what he did. It was with difficulty that he had stood a silent spectator by the death-bed. He longed to minister to her woe, to alleviate the terrible suffering which he saw imprinted on her face. Now that he was alone with her and Mrs Stainer, he would claim the rights of a lover to console and comfort. He said,—

“Zelma, let me stay with you a little time.”

He took her hand; but she looked at him stonily and withdrew it, saying,—

“You must not speak to me again. I am utterly unworthy of your love and friendship. I have committed a terrible sin, and God has justly punished me by taking my dear father away.”

She uttered these words in simple, child-like despair.

“My darling, you are good, and pure, and true. How can you say that you have committed sin, and that God is punishing you?”

He thought that trouble had turned her brain. Paying no heed to Mrs Stainer's presence, he would have taken Zelma in his arms to weep out her grief on his breast. But the girl withdrew herself.

"You do not realise the truth. I am an outcast. I have no religion, no nation, no God. Oh, Mrs Stainer, what shall I do?"

The heart-broken accents of this cry wrung Mrs Stainer's heart.

A flash of light passed through Percy's brain at her words. In the death of Anderson, to whom he was sincerely attached, he had forgotten the morning episode. He saw that the girl was suffering from a shock, far greater than would be caused by her father's death, and it was a shock which other hands must heal. A lover would be of no use, the man to restore her mental balance must be one who could speak with authority. He thought of Mr Stainer, and whispered in Mrs Stainer's ear,—

"Your husband is needed here. He is the only one who can do her any good. I will fetch him."

He knew that, with such a nature as Zelma's, the only balm likely to heal was the outpouring of her soul in confession to one who could, by the power of his

office, lift her out of despair, and declare authoritatively God's mercy.

In a few moments Mr Stainer appeared, and Percy, going to Mrs Stainer's side, asked her to come down with him to the hall below. As the door closed upon them, the old missionary drew a chair to Zelma's side, and laid his hand gently on hers.

"Now," said he, "tell me what is the matter. This is something more than common grief at your loss. You have something on your mind. If you will tell me what it is, I may be able to help you. I am an old friend of yours and your father's. Let me hear what is troubling you?"

His firm, tender tones were irresistible. The poor burdened spirit found tongue, and the whole story was poured forth into the astonished clergyman's ears.

When she came to the arguments used by Rutnam to induce her to go to the temple, they seemed poor and unreasonable. Theory viewed by the light of practice was a very different thing from theory seen only by the light of idealism. If the good-hearted missionary had not helped her, she could never have finished the sad tale. She was too just to blame her mother. She forbore even to blame the Brahmin, whom she believed to have acted solely from

religious zeal and fervour. Mr Stainer was more shrewd, and guessed the motive with which both Mrs Anderson and Rutnam worked.

He had not to deal with motives, however. His care now was to soothe the broken spirit, and restore the self-respect which had been so bitterly wounded.

Her account of her mother's treachery with regard to her own baptism raised his indignation. He said nothing, but there was something in his expression which startled the girl, and made her exclaim,—

"Ah! I see what an outcast you think me. I belong, as mother said, to neither Krishna nor Christ."

"You must not talk like that, Zelma. You are God's child; you deeply repent of your sins, and unfeignedly believe his Holy Gospel. I could at this very moment enrol you in Christ's army. But there is no need for haste. Calm yourself and raise yourself out of this slough of despair."

He spoke very seriously, very decidedly. There was no reproof in his tone; but there was a very beneficial note of command. He saw that it was producing the desired effect, and continued,—

•• "The only person who has committed a sin is your mother. She has sinned through ignorance. She believed that she was acting for the best in depriving you of

God's blessing in baptism. Considering the circumstances, we cannot blame her much for behaving as she did. You have been brought up in the Christian faith. We can soon remedy your mother's error, and make you a veritable member of Christ."

"But, Mr Stainer, think of my wickedness, my unchristian act. I was persuaded to become an idolator. Oh! I must have been mad to do such a thing!"

"You were distracted with grief, and could not know what you were doing. You erred through your great love. You were a mere child in the hands of such a man as the Brahmin, whom I know to be a zealous enthusiast."

Mr Stainer talked a long time speaking decidedly, but kindly. Gradually her reason reasserted itself. The passion that had so impulsively condemned her, gave place to calmer judgment. She was able to view her conduct in its proper light under his guidance, and see how she had been led into folly. He also pointed out that it was not the culpable folly of one who deliberately does what he knows to be wrong; it was the innocent folly which attends the actions of an emotional, impulsive nature.

Whilst Mr Stainer was comforting her, Percy waited with Mrs Stainer in the hall below.

"What has upset Zelma in this way, Mr Bell?" asked Mrs Stainer, with natural curiosity. "She seems troubled with something more than mere grief at her father's death. You divined it, and have sought a remedy in my husband."

"You have not heard what happened this morning?"

He then told her of the feast, and of finding Mrs Anderson and Zelma amongst the worshippers, of his rescue of the girl, and her mother's consequent curses.

"Poor child! poor child!" exclaimed Mrs Stainer, with tears of pity in her eyes. "It must have been the mother's doing. What a cruel thing to have drawn her into such an affair."

"She could have known nothing of what she would see or take part in. I feared at first that she was drugged, and, therefore, not a free agent. But the mother's or the cousin's influence was the only influence under which she acted."

"She ought never to be allowed to come under Mrs Anderson's power again," said Mrs Stainer, with indignation. "She has no father now to protect her, and she will not be safe, mentally or bodily."

"She shall be removed from these scenes at once, and shall never see her mother again," replied Percy, in low, determined tones.

Mrs Stainer looked at him in some surprise.

"It will be no easy matter to separate mother and daughter," she said.

"If I mistake not, the mother will never consent to see her daughter again. She will be persuaded to separate herself entirely from everything connected with her husband, and we shall see no more of her. By-and-by I shall marry Zelma, and take her away."

The calmness and decision with which this was said took Mrs Stainer's breath away.

"You don't mean to say that, with all your prejudices—"

She stopped, finding herself on dangerous ground, but he finished her speech quietly.

"With all my prejudices against the race, I am going to marry one who bears the hated name of 'half-caste.' I am prepared to hear you say I am mad—that I shall repent it all my life. I am not mad, and I shall never repent having won such a peerless girl as Zelma. But I shall remove her from everything connected with her mother. She shall rise to better things on the memory of the dead father. She shall say farewell to India itself forever, and she shall adopt her father's country. There she will never again be subjected to the evil influences of her

✓ mother's people, and together we will work afar off for India's good."

"You are satisfied that she will do all you wish?" asked Mrs Stainer.

"I am satisfied that she loves me," he replied simply.

Mrs Stainer could not but admit that, in such a course as Percy had described, lay Zelma's only chance of happiness. It must entail sacrifice on his part, as he would be obliged to give up the Indian career, which had opened out so promisingly before him. He must start afresh on the road to ambition, for ambition must still be the aim of such a man as Percy. His knowledge of the country and of the people would enable him to work, as he expressed it, for India's good at home. His wife's wealth would give him power and opportunity. The consciousness of his capabilities of working, and the confidence which the last ten years had given him in himself, precluded all sensitiveness on the score of using that wealth. In his early days he had been proud to earn his own living. But, now that a larger sphere of usefulness and happiness opened out before him, he did not hesitate to accept it with all its circumstances.

He found great comfort in this unpremeditated talk with Mrs Stainer. He would never have sought it; but as it so

happened that they had been thrown together, his thoughts found words. The fogs which lay over the future melted away as he spoke, till all was bright and clear in his mind.

When Mr Stainer came down from Zelma's room, Percy asked eagerly after her. He knew what she had suffered, both in the loss of her father and in the shame of the morning's encounter.

"She has recovered from the fearful state of despair in which you left her. She is, of course, full of sorrow, and I do not think that she ought to be alone. You must go back to her, my dear," he said, turning to his wife. "Don't attempt to talk unless she begins herself. You can best minister to her grief in silence."

The funeral took place the following day, and afterwards the will was read.

To the astonishment of every one, including Percy, it was found that Anderson had executed a codicil the very day after Percy had proposed to his daughter. By it he left him a very large sum of money.

Percy was touched by this evidence of the dead man's faith in him. Moreover, it showed that he already considered him in the light of a son, and as such wished to make him independent of his wife's wealth. A handsome annuity was to be paid to Mrs Anderson as long as she lived ;

and a hope was expressed in the will that she would find out her own people and return to them. Legacies were left to many of the clerks and servants who had served him for many years. The property amassed by the merchant was enormous. He possessed estates of valuable land in different parts of the Presidency, shares in banks and railways; he had funded a large fortune in England, and made lucrative investments in Australia. All his affairs were in perfect order, though it would take some time to wind them up.

It was decided amongst Zelma's friends that it would be best for her to leave Trichinopoly at once. A house was taken for her at Bangalore, where she would still be within reach of those who loved her. For the present Percy said nothing of marriage; the keen edge of her grief must first be worn away, there would be time later on to press his suit; and he had little doubt of his success in the end.

Before she left for her new home she drove to the Fort church, and was baptised by Mr Stainer. Only Percy, Minnie, and the missionary's wife were present, for the rest of the community knew nothing of her strange story. This was her last day in the house where her father had lived the greater part of his life. After her return from the Fort, she went all over it with

Minnie. She stayed but a short time in her mother's rooms; the memories connected with it could only give her pain. Then she returned to the great hall, which seemed so unnaturally still and silent. There was no hum of busy clerks in the large room beyond her father's office. The peons were there as usual; but they were silent and motionless, their ears no longer alert for the master's call. The cattle were in their sheds; but their drivers were in the bazaar making holiday. There was no sound but the gentle splash of the fountain.

Minnie led her towards the familiar sitting-room. The punkah, that silent but eloquent witness to an inhabited room, was motionless. To Zelma's senses, sharpened as they were by grief, there was a listless despondency about the hang of the frill, which, like the dejected appearance of the peons, told the sad tale of the departure of the master. The empty sitting-room was arranged with the order and precision of a careful native servant. Its very neatness proclaimed it uninhabited. Yet there were his cigars, his slippers, his walking-sticks, the grey felt helmet she knew so well, the riding-whip and spurs used every morning in their rides. As she glanced around timidly, his presence haunted her; she fancied she heard his step outside, and his voice speaking to the peons. She walked

to the table where his papers were arranged in order. The sight of his handwriting suddenly met her eye. It brought him back to her so vividly, that she was startled out of her self-control. She sank on to his chair, and, laying her head down on the blotter stained by his own pen, she cried, in heartbroken accents,—

“ Oh, father, come back to your child ! ”

Minnie's tears flowed silently. The girl was so utterly forsaken and lonely ; the father dead, the mother gone for ever, and until the lover could fill the aching void, the world was a blank.

The next day, accompanied by Mrs Stainer, Zelma said farewell to Trichinopoly for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

D A W N.

“ Press forward then, nor backward gaze,
Th’ irrevocable Past is flown ;
Before thee shine Hope’s cheering rays,
The Future still remains thine own.” . .
Old Hymn.

FOUR months had passed since Anderson died. They were four months of quiet and peace, in which Zelma’s spirit gradually recovered from the crushing blow of her grief.

At first time went heavily, and life was shorn of all its delights. She drooped and pined, and was unable to interest herself in any of her old occupations. By-and-by youth reasserted itself; the old smile appeared at rare intervals, and her natural joyousness returned.

Mrs Stainer remained with her for some time; when she could no longer stay, Minnie came. Her bright, happy nature did much to restore Zelma. She could weep with her friend, but the smile would play through the tears, like sun through

rain ; sorrow was lightened under her bright influence, and the sound of gentle mirth rang through the house. Later on, Captain Bevan came to join his wife. He was ordered to Bangalore for three months on duty. Zelma begged the young couple to make her house their home during their stay.

The climate of the place had much to do with the restoration of Zelma's spirits, for it is a land of perpetual summer. The roses and violets bloom all the year round. Apples, peaches, strawberries, and oranges flourish. The trees are green and shady from January to December.

Zelma had her horses with her. Every morning saw her in the saddle, every evening the black horses whirled her swiftly along the smooth, well-kept roads. If only the dear father could have been by her side, she would have found it a paradise. In the large military cantonment there was nothing to be seen of native processions. The idol and the tom-tom never startled eye nor ear so long as she kept away from the native town. On all sides she met the stalwart British soldier in his scarlet uniform, or undress kharki coat. No better spot could have been chosen for her, where she would have been so sure of a thorough change of scene. Yet all

the time she felt that the few friends she had were within reach ; a day's journey would take her back to the last resting-place of the one she had loved so dearly.

Percy had not seen her since she left. He had had much correspondence with her on business, and letters passed frequently between them. Very little had been said of their own love affairs ; but from the very first he had assumed the tone of the accepted lover. A word dropped here, an expression there, showed Zelma that the passionate refusal she had given him in the judge's garden had been forgotten, and that her avowal of love had been remembered. She did not resent this appropriation of herself, there was no necessity to ask the momentous question again. She admitted to herself that she would one day stand at his side before the altar and link her fate with his. She remembered how her father had learnt to love Percy, and how he had expressed a hope that he might succeed in his suit. She remembered, also, that her mother had passed out of her life altogether. There remained no obstacle to her happiness ; nothing came between her and her love, nothing but her grief, and this was softening under the influence of time. •

Percy had notified to Government his

wish to retire from the service. His wish had been acceded to, and the time had arrived when he would be free. As it approached, it was with mixed feelings of pleasure and pain that he regarded the step he was taking. His mind had been so thoroughly centred upon his work, that he could not give up what had formed the chief part of his life without regret. With all its toil and anxiety, it suited his temperament; he liked the climate, and he was conscious that his talents were rightly directed. The cutcherry was not a pleasant place, with its heated atmosphere, its crowd of clerks and unwashed petitioners. Yet more than once he looked round on the familiar, unlovely scene with a sigh, as he thought how soon he should turn his back upon it altogether.

But he had little time for regret. He had already begun to discover that the possession of wealth is in itself occupation for the conscientious man. Until he was free from his duties to Government, he was unable to visit Anderson's various estates in the country, and effect the necessary sales. He was anxious to get matters so arranged that he might, if Zelma would consent, claim his bride at midsummer. It was in the beginning of May that the fetters of red tape dropped from him. He handed over charge to his successor, and

that very evening turned his face towards Bangalore.

Zelma had discarded her heavy black draperies during the day, for it was hot and sultry even at Bangalore. Once more she was dressed in girlish white. The broad black sash and knots of ribbon showed, however, that her father was not forgotten. Minnie thought that she had never seen her looking better than when she first appeared in the white frock. The cheeks, so pale with grief a short time ago, had recovered their colour. The sad look had gone from the beautiful eyes. Only the mouth retained the shadow of a great sorrow. When not speaking or smiling, the lips were set almost to sternness. Though convinced by Mr Stainer that she had erred in ignorance, she could only think of that portion of her life with pain. Minnie hoped that Percy's presence would dissipate this, and restore her old happy expression; but the soul that has passed through the fiery furnace of self-reproach, as well as of grief, always has its history stamped upon that most expressive of all features, the mouth.

It was evening; the sun was just touching the horizon, and the garden was glowing under its golden light. Zelma stood in the verandah, listening for the wheels of

her own carriage. Minnie fidgeted from room to room, restless with excitement. She could settle to nothing; she carried the third volume of a novel in her hand, but could not pursue the fortunes of the hero any further. Like Zelma, her ears were alert for the sound of the carriage which was to bring Percy.

There was a cloud of dust on the level road, and the black horses dashed in at the gateway. The carriage door was opened by a quick impatient hand, and the ex-civilian jumped out. Minnie rushed forward with warm-hearted greetings, but Zelma could not speak. The sight of that tall, straight, manly figure brought a rush of sad memories. She could only lay her hand in his, and gaze at him through a mist of tears. He searched her face, and scanned her whole figure. He dreaded to find that sorrow had marred her youth, but he was satisfied. His love was as beautiful as ever; her beauty was only softened by the traces which grief had left upon her face. They went into the pretty drawing-room, sweet with the scent of tea-roses and violets. The balmy evening air moved the lace curtains to and fro. Through the large glass doors that stood open, the garden could be seen, ablaze with colour in the afterglow of the tropical sunset; but Percy

had eyes only for the sweet rose by his side.

Minnie left the lovers to themselves after the first few words of greeting had passed between them. As the door closed upon the young matron, Percy turned to Zelma. She went straight to his arms, and laid her head upon his breast. Ah, it was sweet at last to find shelter there. Life was not to be a dull blank, a worthless, regretful existence. New hopes were springing up to brighten her horizon. There was no disloyalty to the dead; he would rejoice, could he know that his dear daughter was not standing quite alone in the world. The storm-clouds had disappeared, and nothing came to mar the love that was so strong and true.

Without a word she lifted her face to his, and their lips met. Both felt the bliss of peace as well as of love.

"My darling, my own at last," murmured Percy.

There was silence; then she whispered a few broken words in his ear.

"I know that he is glad at this," she said; "he is blessing us from his home above."

"I am sure of it," he answered fervently. "Do you know, Zelma, that his last earnest wish was this?"

"Was it?" she said, lifting her head and gazing up at him inquiringly.

"Yes; so sure was he that you loved me, that he told me to marry you and take you away. I needed no bidding, sweet one, it was only too hard to wait."

"When did he say that?"

Percy could hardly catch the words, they were so low and breathless.

"On the first day of his illness, after that terrible night," he replied.

Again she was silent. It was hard, even at this interval of time, to speak composedly of the dead father.

"I have only you now, Percy," she whispered, involuntarily nestling closer.

The words thrilled him through.

"And in me you shall find all you need, my own love!" he exclaimed passionately. "We will begin a new life together, and a new work; and we will seek a new home. Will you trust me with your happiness?"

For answer her lips rested on his, and he took long draughts of love, for which his soul had thirsted during the last four months.

Later on in the evening, Zelma and Percy wandered out into the garden, leaving Captain Bevan to smoke his after-dinner cheroot in the verandah with his faithful little wife. The young couple

were by no means tired of each other's company. As Zelma's white skirt disappeared in the leafy shade of the jâk trees, Minnie drew her chair a little closer to her husband, and rested her head on his shoulder.

"I am so glad they have come together at last," she said, with a contented little sigh.

"Yes; it is jolly to see a good fellow like Bell made happy at last. He looks, too, as if he wanted a change; the last few months have told upon him."

"He has a lifetime before him, in which he can rest if he likes," said Minnie.

"He is not the sort of man to sink into idleness. He will make work for himself of some sort; we shall see him in Parliament before long, making speeches on our burning Indian questions."

"I hope Zelma will consent to a speedy marriage," she remarked presently.

"Bell told me, after you left the table, that he has to run down south to see after some land there; he will also be obliged to pay a visit to Madras. He wants to get all business matters settled first; he will be able to take a real holiday afterwards," said her husband.

"Then we shall just see them married before we go back to the regiment."

"I fancy so," replied Captain Bevan.

Three months later, Mr and Mrs Percy Bell stood on the deck of a large ship which was slowly steaming out of the Madras harbour. The ship's head was set southwards and her goal was old England. Gradually the long low shore sank on the horizon and was left in the distance. The buildings which stood along the beach passed like a panorama before their eyes, till 'St Thomas' Mount was lost in the haze of heat that lay over the land. Zelma's hand was nestling on Percy's arm.

"Good-bye to India for ever," he said, looking down at his wife.

Her happy face was unclouded. She smiled at him brightly, saying,—

"And good-bye to the sun!"

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed. "Old Sol will follow us, and I am going to show him to you in dear old Italy. We shall find the Nilgherries at Sorrento, and Bangalore at Mentone, Bangalore with the sea."

"Ah! but I am not afraid of losing the sun now," she whispered.

"You can do without him?"

"I have him with me always when I have you," was the reply.

Percy's hand closed over the soft white

fingers that rested on his arm, and, bending over her, his passionate words mingled with the wash of the waves.

“My sweet rose! My beautiful lotus!
My own wife!”

THE END.

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